

BHOTIA HIGHLANDERS OF NAR AND PHU

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The territories of high altitude on Nepal's northern border still harbour a few small communities hardly known to anthropologists. This is partly due to the remoteness of their habitat, difficult of access during large parts of the year, and partly to the fact that for political reasons areas close to a sensitive international frontier have been closed to most foreign travellers. The decision of the Government of Nepal not to expose such regions to the increasing flood of tourists had had the great advantage of shielding at least a small percentage of the mountain dwellers from the commercialism of a tourist trade which has already transformed the social and cultural pattern of such communities as the Sherpas of Khumbu.

One area which has so far remained unaffected by the modernizing and disrupting influences of tourism extends north of the relatively populous and economically advanced region referred to by outsiders as Manang and by the local inhabitants as Nyeshang. Manang, a broad valley drained by the Marsyandi River, lies between the mighty Annapurna range and a much less forbidding range which includes the Pisang peak. In the high valley to the north of the Pisang peak, at no great distance from the Tibetan border, lie two Bhotia villages known as Nar and Phu, and these two village communities have retained a life-style similar to that which not

long ago was characteristic of many of the Tibetan speaking highlanders of Nepal's northern borderlands. Similar culture patterns prevail still in parts of Dolpo and in such little known areas as the Limi region of Humla.

In 1960 the British Tibetologist David Snellgrove passed briefly through Nar and Phu, and his impressions are contained in his book *Himalayan Pilgrimage* (Oxford 1961), and in 1976 and 1977 Naresh J. Gurung published some observations on the same area in *Kailash* (Volumes 4 and 5). Thanks to a special permit graciously granted to me by His Majesty King Birendra I and my young colleague Charlotte Hardman were able to spend the greater part of April and May 1981 among the people of Nar and Phu. The following notes on these two communities cannot claim to draw a comprehensive ethnographic picture of the Bhotias of these remote localities, but they may at least throw some light on certain aspects of a way of life which, though at one time prevailing among most of the Himalayan high altitude dwellers, is today confined to a few rapidly shrinking refuge areas. Yet it is based on an ideology allowing men and women, living in a harsh environment, to lead a satisfying and dignified life free of oppression and exploitation by more powerful ethnic groups. Anybody familiar with the lamentable condition of the majority of Indian tribal populations can only marvel at the way in which the Bhotias of Nar and Phu have preserved their personal and economic freedom, and the skill with which they utilize the resources of a land that yields its fruits only to the most industrious and determined.

Although the people of Nar and Phu belong culturally to the Tibetan sphere, the language they speak is allied to the language of the Manangbas and is believed to belong to the Gurung branch of the Bodic division of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic family, which includes Tamang, Gurung and

Thakali.¹ Most people of Nar and Phu know Tibetan and many men are literate in classical Tibetan, but their own dialect is not understood by such Tibetan speakers as the Bhotias of Mustang.

In the summer Nar can be reached from Manang by way of the high Kang-la, but during the rest of the year access is easier via Chame, the headquarters of the Manang district, which lies on the right bank of the Marsyandi river about two days walk upstream from Thonje. Near Chame the Marsyandi is joined by the Nar Khola, and it is along this mountain stream that a path leads through precipitous gorges and dense forests to the higher and more open country where the people of Nar have their grazing grounds and cultivate some patches of land.

Local people used to carrying heavy loads over mountainous country take less than one day from the confluence of Marsyandi and Nar Khola to reach the first upland settlement known as Metta, which lies at an altitude of 11,004 feet amidst extensive pastures. Some parts of these have been converted to walled-in fields where people of Nar grow potatoes, buckwheat and oilseeds. Some substantial, stone-built houses serve only as temporary winter quarters, and this explains their somewhat delapidated state. According to oral tradition Metta was once a large settlement but during the wars between the Jumla Raja and the Lo Gyelbu (Mustang Raja), both of whom aspired to the dominance over Thak Khola, warriors of the Jumla Raja destroyed Metta and killed most of its inhabitants. Nar is believed to have escaped the massacre because it is hidden in a side valley. Whatever the truth of this story may be, the rivalry between Jumla and Mustang is a historical

1. Cf. Martine Mazandon, Consonantal Mutation and Tonal split in the Tamang sub-family of Tibeto-Burman, *Kailash* Vol. VI, 1978, Number 3, p. 158.

fact, and we also know that Nar maintained regular trade relations with Mustang until the recent decline of the salt trade with Tibet. The drying up of this trade may be a cause for the sad state of Metta, for as long as a trade route ran from the Marsyandi valley through Phu to Tibet, Metta must have had some importance as a staging post.

From Metta the track leads along the Nar Khola as far as a bridge close to a *gompa* known as Yung-kar-lha-chö, and a huge stepped *chorten* painted white and red. After crossing the Nar Khola the path ascends steeply and leads finally to the village of Nar, which lies at an altitude of about 13,500 feet.

The houses of Nar are built against a steep hill-side which looks as if it had been scooped out of the mountain side rising above the broad bowl of the valley. In 1981 there were 61 houses, but old people remembered that in their youth the number of houses was only about 40. The houses of Nar stand in compact clusters, some built wall to wall, others separated by narrow lanes. The front door leads into a small courtyard where a cow may be kept, but access to the interior of the house is usually gained by climbing a notched ladder to the flat roof, and from there descending through a square opening and down another ladder which leads to a landing outside the main living room. Compared to the spacious living quarters of Sherpa or Thakali houses the habitations of the Nar people are poky and uncomfortable, but the lack of space inside the house is made up by the large flat roof surrounded by a raised stone frame. It is there that people sit and gossip, wash and dress their hair, and above all perform the greater part of the household chores. There women grind grain and pound spices, sift rice and pulses, press oilseed, spin wool and weave cloth on simple stretch looms. Men also spin, soften leather and make boots with light leather soles and woven uppers.

The carving of ploughs and other agricultural implements is also done on the flat roofs which combine thus the functions of a living room with that of a workshop.

On one side of the roof, usually the one adjoining the hill-side, there is a covered shelter, which serves as a temporary store, but may also be used for gatherings and the performance of rituals commissioned by the householder and involving recitations from liturgical books by several lamas. More profane is the use of such shelters on the roof tops by young people who sleep there and indulge in amorous encounters impracticable in the cramped quarters of the interior of the house.

The lower part of the house is used as a store and shelter for domestic animals such as cows, sheep and goats, and sometimes very young yak calves.

On the steeply sloping village site the houses are arranged in tiers, so that from the roofs of those on the highest points one has a view of all the activities on the roofs below.

House-sites are privately owned, and as it is customary for a father to provide a married son with a separate house, people who own no vacant site may buy an old house and re-construct it for their son, or they may apply to the village councillors for permission to build on a hitherto unused part of the village-site; for this they are charged a fee. Houses are never let out on rent. Timber for house-building may only be cut in the forests lying below Metta.

When a new house is built, the owner employs other villagers to help in the construction and pays them wages in cash or kind. In 1981 a large house was valued at about Rs 20,000 to 30,000. In 1979 and 1980 no new houses had

been built, but in 1978 two rather small new houses had been constructed for elder sons who, when married, moved out of the parental house.

Stone is the principal building material in Nar as it is in Phu and all of the villages of Nyeshang. The stones are crudely fashioned and held together by a mixture of clay, sand and dung. Timber is scarce in Nar, yet rafters and the frames of doors and windows have to be made of wood, and this is laboriously carried up from the forest below Metta. Even greater is the quantity of timber used in the construction of the great halls of Buddhist temples. There are four such *gompa* in Nar, though only the one owned and used by the entire village community is being kept in good repair.

The village of Phu, which lies one and a half day's walk north of Nar, is the last permanent settlement on the Nepalese side of the Chinese border. While the architectural style is basically similar to that of Nar, the very different topography has necessitated some modifications in the positioning and the construction of houses. The centre of Phu occupies fortress-like a high hill whose near vertical east side drops precipitously into the river valley several hundred feet below. On the crown of that hill the founders of Phu erected their houses making up by height the limitations of the narrow site. On the two sides where the hill does not plunge down in a sheer cliff-face terraces have been carved out of the slope to accommodate some store sheds and shelters for cattle. From a saddle which connects the original settlement with an extension of habitations to a nearby hillside, one climbs past such cattle sheds a series of stone-steps leading to a tiered terrace. Looking westwards this terrace catches the afternoon sun, and numerous villagers gather there day after day to enjoy the warmth of

the sun, gossip, and engage in spinning, wood carving, and any other work not bound by necessity to a particular place. They are a cheerful crowd, and young and old frequent this meeting place every fine afternoon.

More stone steps lead up to the main gate of the village, constructed of heavy planks which in days of insecurity and attacks by bands of brigands was shut at night barring entry to any stranger. For there is no other door and the houses stand on the edge of cliffs difficult to scale even in broad day light.

Once inside the gate one finds oneself in a labyrinth of narrow lanes and dark tunnels. The grey stone walls of houses, here and there broken by small windows, rise three or four stories high. Owing to the scarcity of timber the doors giving access to the houses are low, forcing those entering to double up. Here and there a few stone steps lead up to one of these small doors positioned above ground level.

Having entered such a door one stands in almost total darkness at the foot of a notched ladder, which is the first of three or four ladders leading steeply to the landings which provide access to store rooms and cramped living quarters. One of these houses contains on the fourth floor a private chapel with an altar flanked by large *thanka* and a small collection of Tibetan books. It was built by the great-great-grandfather of the present owner. Every year six families of his clan gather there to perform the Lopye rite for Guru Rimpoche and Change Dorje. One can only admire the religious fervour and artistic urge of people living in such a harsh environment and amidst the squalor of houses blackened by the fires of yak-dung and juniper branches.

Within the complex of high and narrow houses there lies

a spacious hall used for festivals, dancing and drinking, and occasionally also for wedding parties. From the gallery of this hall a door opens into the Yul-gompa ('village temple') which, even though not very large, is used by the entire village community. A set of statues, representing Jambala, Tshepame, Guru Trakpo, Guru Rimpoche and Seng-droma, and the figure of a king on an elephant, stand on the altar, but in 1981 there were no books, because they had been taken to Tashi gompa, the nearby monastery, where they are more frequently utilized in rituals attended by the villagers.

Tashi gompa stands by itself on a nearby hill and serves as the venue of several village festivals.

SEASONAL MOVEMENTS

The majority of the people of Nar and Phu do not reside in their villages throughout the year. Economic necessity compels them to move from place to place in the pursuance of their herding activities, in the interest of trading opportunities, and under the pressure of climatic conditions. Both Nar and Phu are semi-deserted during the height of the winter, and the needs of the herds of yak, oxen, sheep and goats determine to a great extent the movements of at least part of the population.

The pastures sustaining the herds of Nar are communal property, and their use is closely controlled in order to prevent overgrazing. The pasture lands extend vertically from altitudes of about 10,000 feet to heights of 16,000 feet. Their horizontal expansion is not easily estimated, as stretches of pasture are divided by ravines, rocks and glacial moraines, but the area within which Nar herdsman move is probably not less than 180 square miles and may well be more. Nearest to the village there are pastures which during spring and summer

are used for the grazing of sheep, goats and cows, while yak are allowed to roam over more distant and higher slopes. Apart from the grazing land at the altitude of Nar and above, there are extensive pastures at lower levels. Like the Sherpas the Nar people describe such areas grazed mainly in the winter as *gunsa* while the high summer pastures are referred to as *yersa*.

The grazing cycle remains basically unchanged year after year. In January, when Nar and the surrounding pastures are in the grip of snow and ice, and only a few people remain in the village, all the herds are kept near the lower lying *gunsa* settlements of Chaku, Metta and Namya. The former two are situated below the tree line in the valleys of the Nar and Phu rivers, and there the pastures, if free of snow, provide some fodder in the shape of dry grass, and to this is added a supply of hay, cut in the previous summer and stored in the branches of trees where the sun keeps it dry. The people looking after the livestock crowd into a few houses, those of the same clan staying usually together in one house. In Chaku there are three houses which had been built by Tibetan refugees and later abandoned. Up to nine Nar households share one house in Chaku; they cook and eat rice, potatoes and vegetables jointly, but eat *tsampa* separately. Despite the overcrowding in such houses people of the same clan avoid sexual relations, but some bold young men occasionally sneak into other houses and seek adventures with girls of clans other than their own.

Other winter settlements are at Namya, a valley to the east of Metta and sheltered behind a mountain range which can be crossed only in the summer, while in the winter a path skirting the range avoids snow-bound passes. In the Namya valley there are several houses dispersed over the pastures. Unlike those of Nar they do not have flat roofs

but are constructed with slate-covered gabled roofs like the Sherpa houses of Khumbu. Namya has a milder and more humid climate than Nar, and when the valley is covered in mist yak can be traced only by the sound of their bells.

The use of houses and pastures at Namya is regulated by an old established system of rotation. One group of families, who in 1981 owned altogether twelve yak herds spends one winter in Namya while all the other villagers and their herds remain in Chaku and Metta. The following year there is a change of pastures and those herders whose yak had benefitted from the relatively abundant grazing in Namya, move to the surroundings of Nar, and are replaced by others who had to forego the ample grazing at Namya for a whole year. The change-over occurs in June when grass is most plentiful. At that time the herds which had been kept at Chaku, Metta and the vicinity of Nar are driven to Namya, and for one month all the herds share the luscious pastures of Namya.

The houses of Namya are also exchanged in accordance with this cycle, and as such houses are regarded as joint property, it is not always the same people who take turns in the occupation of specific houses. In Namya there is no need to store hay, for in the milder and more humid climate there is limited grazing for yak even in the winter.

In February and March winter conditions continue, and the only domestic animals then in Nar are a few milking cows which are kept in the houses and fed on stored hay. But every year some die of cold and towards the end of the winter often also of starvation if the supply of fodder runs out.

In the course of April the herds kept in the *gunsa* settlements of Chaku and Metta are brought to Nar, and on all the nearby slopes there are then herds of yak, while in the morning young boys and girls drive flocks of sheep and goats to the pastures.

At the beginning of the ploughing season the Nar people round up some male yak and tether them in the village to be at hand when they have to be yoked to the plough. During the short spell when they are required for traction they are fed with hay or straw.

At the end of May and in early June most yak are taken to the high *yersa* settlements. In some of these the herdsmen have houses built of stone, in others they stay in caves and in the highest *yersa* they use tents as shelter. Most of the women remain in Nar, irrigate the fields and occupy themselves with the weaving of woolen cloth and yak-hair blankets.

During August the herds remain in the *yersa*, but some of the herders come down to Nar and celebrate the Dardze festival. In September yak and sheep, tended by men, stay in the *yersa*, and women cut grass and dry it to serve as fooder in the coming winter.

In early October most of the people move to the *gunsa* settlements and there reap barley, buckwheat and potatoes. Only a few men stay with their yak in the lower *yersa*. In late October and early November the yak are taken to Nar and at the same time the crops grown at Nar are harvested.

In early December yak and horses are brought to Nar to graze on the stubble of the harvested fields. Some are taken even further down to the *gunsa* settlements. By the end of December all the work on the fields has been completed, and the herds are in *gunsa* or at Namya.

The movements of herds listed above necessitate corresponding movements of the people looking after them, but in these by no means all the villagers of Nar are involved. While one son of a family may be in a high *yersa* with the yak, other members of the family may either work at Nar or be on

their way to the lower country where they sell their produce and buy supplies to supplement their homegrown food.

Immediately after the performance of the Lhosar rite, which marks the beginning of the new year, a few of the Nar people set out for the lowlands, taking with them such trade goods as yak hair blankets and woollen cloth. The grain which they barter for these articles is collected and stored in the houses of friends at Kubar near Chame, to be later carried up to Nar.

In the village of Phu the winter is even harsher than in Nar, and there its onset triggers off a total exodus of all the villagers with the single exception of the Lama of the Tashi *gumpa* and his small community of monks. Old people who cannot walk and small children are carried when families set out on the trek to Khyang, a settlement lying a few hours' walk downstream from Phu. In this sheltered locality every Phu family has a house, partly sunk into the ground and hence protected against the winter storms which sweep through the valley. Yak, sheep and goats are also taken to Khyang and fed there on hay collected during the warmer months. They are looked after mainly by elderly people while the young and active spend the winter in touring the lowlands to sell blankets, sacks and ropes, all produced in Phu. In April and May, when the agricultural season begins, most Phu people return to their village, but some stay with their flocks of sheep and goats for a few more weeks at Khyang.

Yak are brought to Phu for ploughing, but thereafter are taken to higher pastures and kept there until the onset of the autumn frosts compels them to seek lower lying grazing land.

There are only a few months when all the members of a family stay together in one place. For during the rest of

the year the demands of herding, farming and trade keep able bodied men and also many of the younger women on the move. Hence people are used to leaving their main houses for long periods and to put up with the discomfort of staying in cramped habitations where members of several families share congested quarters, or of moving from camp to camp when peddling their wares in the lower country.

ANIMAL HUSBANDRY

While the villagers of Nar and Phu have only limited acreages of cultivable land, they have large stretches of pasturage, and it is for this reason that pastoral activities play so large a role in their economy. Indeed the time spent by men and women on the herding of animals and the processing of their products is greater than that devoted to any other enterprise, even though at certain times the entire community seems to be involved in the cultivation of their land. Yet the produce of their land is not sufficient to provide them with basic food throughout the year. If it were not for the products directly derived from domesticated animals there would be little to trade with, and hence no way of obtaining by purchase the grain grown in the lowlands which serves to supplement the inadequate yield of the people's own land.

The number of yak (male and female)² owned by the people of Nar was in 1981 approximately 2000 and this means that on an average there are 32 yak per household, a ratio very much higher than that prevailing among such yak breeders as Sherpas of Khumbu or Bhotias of Humla. The people of Nar owned then also 300-400 sheep, 40-50 cows and 35 horses. The richest man of Nar owned 110 yak (40 males and 70 females). Families of

2. In the language of Nar only males are known as yak while females are called *thimo*.

lesser means owned between ten and twenty yak, and men who have only a small number of yak often pool their herds and take turns in looking after the animals or jointly engage a herdsman. Thus Pema Kundzem, a widow, owned four yak and seven *thimo*, and had pooled that small herd with the herds of her two sons and that of her younger daughter's husband. Such combined herds are made up of the animals of kinsfolk or special close friends, for in view of the great value of yak only those who trust each other implicitly will share in the care of their animals.

In the summer there are usually some women with the herds and it is they who do most of the milking. Only men without wives or daughters have to do the milking themselves. It is always men who bleed yak, an operation performed on sickly animals, as there is the belief that bleeding improves their chance of recovery. The blood drawn from the jugular vein is allowed to coagulate, and is then cooked and fried mixed with *tsampa* made of barley.

Yak are shorn in the warm season, usually in July or August. The long hair is cut off with knives, but the soft woolly hair is plucked. Both are used for weaving cloth and mats, and the long hair also for making ropes. All these articles are important trade goods, for the people in the plains have no comparable raw material, the wool of their sheep being softer than the strong and hard hair of yak.

The milk of yak is seldom drunk raw, but it is sometimes used for the preparation of salted Tibetan tea, though that type of tea is more often made by putting lumps of butter into the hot tea and churning the mixture. The bulk of the milk is used for making butter, which is the Bhotia's main cooking fat, and is also burnt in lamps, used for the preparation of sacrificial cakes (*torma*), and as an emollient to

soften rough skin. As a cosmetic butter is rubbed into the hair to make it shiny. Butter is, moreover, an important article of trade, and the people of Nar and Phu sell considerable quantities to Manangbas charging an average price of Rs 40 per kilogram.

The meat of yak is eaten, but yak are rarely slaughtered unless they are incapacitated by a fall from a cliff or seriously wounded by wolves or snow leopards. There is no class of Butchers, as there is among the Sherpas, but some ordinary men of Nar act as slaughterers. As the killing of any animal is regarded as sinful such men may not participate in any ritual acts and they usually have not learnt to read the religious texts. They slaughter not only yak but also sheep and the latter are occasionally killed for the sake of their meat.

Yak are regularly sold to Manangbas and many Nar people depend on the sale of yak for acquiring the cash which they need for buying rice. A man owning a herd of over 100 animals may sell annually three to four animals, usually yak or old *thimo* which are no longer fertile. Men with smaller herds may sell only two animals a year, and poor men only occasionally an old yak.

Nar people sometimes buy both male and female yak from Mustang, and occasionally people from Dolpo come to Nar and sell yak, but Nar people never go there. Trade in yak can be profitable, for Nar men can buy yak in Mustang for Rs 2000 and then sell them for Rs 2800 to Manangbas. As the latter have many sources of income and engage in long distance trading activities they are probably reluctant to spare the time for a long trek to Mustang, and find it more convenient and economical to use Nar people as intermediaries.

Yak from Nubri are seldom bought, for they do not survive

in Nar for long. Unlike most other Bhotias of Nepal the people of Nar and Phu neither breed nor keep *dzo* and *dzomu*, the hybrids resulting from the crossing of yak with ordinary cattle. In most parts of Tibet there is a religious taboo on producing such "unnatural" crossbreeds, but many Tibetans used to purchase *dzo* from Nepal to serve as pack animals and for ploughing. The aversion of the Nar people against *dzo* is so strong that a *dzo* brought from outside and dying in Nar on account of a fall would not be eaten and the carcass would be thrown away.

The flesh of cows and oxen is also shunned and this taboo may be due to the Nar people's contact with Hindus during their frequent visits to the lowlands. But whereas Hindus consider yak as "cows", call them *chauri-gai* and hence abstain from their meat, Bhotias of Nar and Phu do not go so far, and see no harm in eating yak-meat.

The practice of dedicating yak of both sexes to deities common among Sherpas and other Bhotias is followed also by the people of Nar and Phu. When there has been a disaster occasioned by an avalanche or rock-fall, or yak have died of disease, a lama is consulted and he may advise the dedication of a yak to the family deity (*srungma*) of the household affected. The term for a yak dedicated to a deity is *tseter*, and the rite of dedication is called *tseter-phibe-rekhe*. Once a year this dedication is confirmed by a special rite. The dedicated animal may neither be killed nor sold, its hair may not be shorn, and it may not be used for ploughing, but may carry a load. A dedicated female may be milked and its calf may be sold. Preferrably white or reddish animals are chosen for dedication.

Yak are fitted with nose-rings by the piercing of the septum. Into the hole broken rings made of juniper wood can

be inserted or a rope may be threaded and this is done mainly for the purpose of facilitating the control of yak during ploughing.

Compared to the economic value of yak and the prestige derived from their possession the value of sheep is relatively small. The ownership of sheep and goats does not greatly enhance a Bhotia's social status even though the material profit from a flock may be substantial. The flesh of sheep and goats is eaten and both are sold to Manangbas or Gurungs. To protect them from predators sheep and goats are kept during the night in huts and pens, and during the day lambs and kids are separated from their mothers, usually also in pens, to prevent them from drinking all their milk. Enough milk for the young has to be kept, however, when ewes and goats are milked. Curd made of the milk of goats and sheep is eaten with *tsampa* and other dishes, or is dried and then serves in the shape of *churbi* as a durable food which can be carried on journeys and by herdsmen when staying in high pastures.

Ordinary cows are of relatively little importance. A few families keep two or three cows in the village in order to have milk when the herds of yak and sheep are on distant pastures.

AGRICULTURE

Altitude and climate set limits to the variety of crops the farmers of Nar and Phu can grow on the land near their main settlements, both of which lie well above 13,000 feet. The agricultural season is short, for until the end of March the soil is frozen, and the preparation of the fields can begin only in April. As cultivation depends on irrigation the channels bringing the water of streams to the fields are repaired at that time. In Nar there is one main channel, the upkeep of which is undertaken jointly by the entire community,

whereas the repair of the minor channels is the responsibility of the individual landowners. April is also the time when the people repair, and if necessary rebuild, the walls and terraces of their fields. For most of the fields are terraced and the levels have to be maintained in such a way that the irrigation water is most economically distributed. Before the ploughing begins manure is carried to the fields, and most of this is spread over the fields where potatoes will be planted. This is a relatively new crop, for the first potatoes were introduced from Nubri only some sixty years ago. The main crop of both Nar and Phu is barley, and wheat and buckwheat can be grown only in lower lying *gunsa* settlements such as Metta.

Ploughing begins usually in the last days of April or in early May. The day is fixed by the village councillors (*gampa lenzing*), for this is an operation to be undertaken by the whole community at the same time, and has to be preceded by a ritual performed on a field believed to be the place where in the legendary past the founder of Nar planted the first barley. The following day a minor ceremony takes place in the centre of the cultivated area, where three *chorten*, known as *sum-gomba*, stand on a small hillock near the *Drewa gomba*.

In 1981 the villagers of Nar started ploughing on the 2nd May. From early morning onwards there was an atmosphere of feverish activity. Large numbers of yak were driven from the nearby hill-slopes into the centre of the valley, where they spread out into the fields surrounded by stone walls. There the prospective plough-yak were rounded up. Their owners lassoed them with ropes, and then set about to insert wooden rings into their noses or thread ropes through the holes in the animal's septum. Some of the yak resisted and had to be thrown to the ground with their legs tightly fettered. The owners realize that this procedure is painful to

the yak, and one of them told me that because of the treatment meted out to yak most people cannot achieve a good reincarnation. Yet on that day the whole operation of catching the yak and fastening the nose ropes went smoothly, and most of the yak allowed themselves quite meekly to be led by ropes attached to their noses.

At first they were taken to the village and tied up, and only when people had eaten did individual families set out for the fields. One man led a pair of yak, another carried a yoke, and a third a plough, while women carried hoes and rakes, as well as baskets containing barley seed. It was a picturesque scene with many pairs of yak, some black, others grey, brown or white being led down to the fields, and the many women in red clothes spreading out on the fields. The ploughs are made of one solid piece of wood with an iron point hafted on the share. Leather thongs secure the yoke to the plough.

On terrace fields already prepared by hoeing and the removal of larger stones, the ploughmen, one leading the yak and the other guiding the plough, began at the edge and described a circle till they came to the centre of the field. At the same time one man strode over the field and broadcast barley seed. This was then ploughed in and evenly distributed by raking over the soil. On the edges of the field women dug a shallow ditch to be used for irrigation once water became available. Only men guide the plough, but women may lead the pair of yak.

Men who own many fields do the ploughing very methodically. Thus Sangma Chösang, who owns a total of 40 fields, managed to plough and sow 14 fields on the first day of the ploughing. He worked with two ploughs and five yak. One yak was always resting, and was then substituted for a yak

of one of the two pairs. The next day all five yak were allowed to rest, and five other yak would do the work of ploughing. In this way Chösang had never to work with tired animals. It is obvious that only a man owning at least ten yak can use this system of rotation.

A man who does not have sufficient working members in his household has to hire ploughmen and pay them Rs 11 per day. Strangely enough there is no additional charge for a pair of yak to be supplied by the hired ploughman, who brings his own yak if the owner of the field is short of animals. All hired workers get also their food as well as *chang*. The demand for hired labour is considerable. Thus the head-lama of Nar who was too old to work on his fields and had only one male worker in his household, namely his resident son-in-law, used two thirds of the yield of his land for paying hired workers.

In the somewhat arid climate of Nar the crops, and particularly barley, can only thrive if adequately irrigated, and the distribution of the water available for irrigation is hence strictly regulated. There is a register in which the water rights of the individual landowners are recorded. Three field-watchers (*yur-taba*) appointed in rotation, control the allocation of water according to this register. The members of the Narpa clan, who claim descent from the first settlers, are given priority in the allocation of water; next the fields of Er phowe, and after them the fields of Menden and Hrönden men receive water according to the order laid down in the register. Though the fields are scattered there are sufficient small channels to make such a distribution possible. As the amount of water available for irrigation is finite, there is a limit to the land which can be newly taken under cultivation.

Barley is reaped in late October or early November, but potatoes, radishes and mustard may be harvested somewhat earlier. Even families owning a fair amount of land are seldom self-sufficient in respect of the grain they require to meet their domestic needs, and they depend on the sale of yak or sheep, as well as on trade to make up the shortfall. The following budgets reflect this position.

Lama Nyetak is one of the major landholders of Nar, owning 40 fields of varying size. In an average year he reaps 30 *muri* of barley at Nar. He also hires out on share two fields in Metta and receives one half of the crop of wheat, buckwheat and oilseed grown there. If the barley crop is fair he divides it into three shares, one of which suffices for his household which consists of three adults and six small children. The other two thirds are used for paying hired labour. He usually sells two or three yak to Manangbas and with the money this brings in he buys rice from people of Lamjung who come to Nar to sell it there. For a load of rice of about 18 *pathi* he pays Rs 300 to 400. Any surplus of butter he has is bartered for buckwheat in Manang.³

Lhakpa and his brother Rinsing Pasang own 31 fields on which they sow 25 *pathi* of barley and 15 *pathi* of potatoes, rotating these crops from year to year. In an average year the family, which consists of three adults and one adolescent girl reaps 30-32 *muri* of barley and 3 *muri* of potatoes. Of this yield 4 *muri* of barley is used for paying labourers. What remains is not sufficient to feed the family, and they buy about 6 *muri* of rice from Dumre or Lamjung, and 2-3 *muri*

3. *Muri* and *pathi* are measures of capacity used for measuring grain. One *muri* is equivalent to 2.4 bushels or 20 *pathi*; a *muri* of barley approximates 67.3 kilogram; one *pathi* is roughly equivalent to 1 gallon.

of buckwheat from Manang. From three fields at Metta they normally get about 2 *muri* of wheat. They usually sell one or two yak, but do not produce enough butter to have a surplus for sale.

Chosang, who owns 40 fields, reaps sufficient barley for the needs of his family of six, and he buys about 5 *muri* of rice, 2 *muri* of maize, and 1 *muri* of millet (*eleusine coracana*) with money derived from the sale of yak. He also exchanges butter for wheat and buckwheat grown in Manang.

LAND TENURE

As long as land is not brought under cultivation it is considered communal property of the village in whose territory it is situated. The boundaries of such village territories are traditional and are not registered in government records. Recently there was a dispute between Nar and Phu regarding the grazing rights on a stretch of pasture land lying between the two villages, and when the villagers approached the Chief District Officer in Chame for a decision, he could find no other solution than to tell them that they should alternate the use of the grazing land from year to year.

In the vicinity of villages, however, there is no doubt that all the uncultivated land is public property. Any villager who wants to convert such land into cultivable fields has to obtain the permission of the village councilors, and this is fairly freely granted. Once he has made the land arable it is considered his private property, and he can sell it at will, irrespective of the length of time he had been in possession. Hence most cultivated land is individually owned and entered in the register used by the field-watchers (*yur-taba*).

Sometimes disputes arise over the delimitation of

individual fields, for when the wall of a terrace crumbles and has to be rebuilt it is possible slightly to enlarge the upper field. Such disputes used to be adjudicated by the *gampa lenzing*, but nowadays the village panchayat may also intervene. Land may be sold for cash or bartered for yak, but only to residents of Nar and under no circumstances to outsiders or even men of Phu. Whoever wants to sell land must first offer it to his paternal kinsmen; only if none of them buys it, may he sell it to some one else. Occasionally credit may be allowed and payment delayed for 3 or 4 years by mutual agreement. A field requiring 1 *pathi* of barley seed costs about Rs 2000 if it lies close to the village and to an irrigation channel, or Rs 1500 if it is situated at some distance. Land transactions are not common, and on average only one field changes hands in a year.

Apart from the fields which belong to individuals, there are also some which were at one time private property but have been donated for public use. Such land is known as *chösing*. Each of the clan-groups has some *chösing* fields and these are cultivated in rotation by the members of the clan, their yield being used for clan-rites and feasts. *Chösing* land is also dedicated to religious buildings. Thus there is *chösing* land attached to the gate-way (*kani*) and the long *mane*-wall in Nar. *Chösing* land was established by rich people who left some of their fields to the lamas of their clan or to the clan-*gampa*.

The person whose turn it is to cultivate the *chösing* land must deliver to clan or *gampa* a stipulated quantity of barley. If the crops are good, he will make a profit, but if the yield is bad he may have to make up the deficiency from the barley grown on his own fields.

After the *chösing* field dedicated to a clan-*gampa* has

been reaped the whole yield has to be kept in the house of the sacristan (*konyer*). Then all the clan-members gather and measure the barley, and seal the chest in which it is to be kept. It is believed that such barley never decays, and that it can be kept for as long as twenty years. It is used for rituals, and some may be sold and the proceeds used for the purchase of butter and other commodities required for the performance of rites. Barley from *chösing* fields may also be used for making beer to be drunk when the clan-members gather to worship the clan-deity.

Until recent years there was no assessment of land-revenue, but now the village of Nar is taxed and has to pay to government a lump sum of Rs 254.92. Individual landowners contribute to this tax in proportion to the size and productivity of their holdings. The village of Phu pays a lump sum of Rs 83.54. There is also an annual tax of half a rupee per yak and nine paisa per sheep or goat.

TRADE

Like all the high altitude dwellers of Nepal's borderlands, the people of Nar and Phu depend on trade to supplement their income from farming and herding. Yet, their trade was never comparable to that of the people of Thak Khola and Mustang, either in volume or the diversity of goods bought and sold. Until 1959, when political events in Tibet led to the closing of Nepal's border with China, a limited amount of Tibetan salt seemed to have reached Phu, and from there it was carried to Metta and Chame. Nar did not lie on this direct route, but some Nar men used to go to Mustang and there sold implements made of bamboo and various wooden articles. They were not supposed to trade freely in the villages of Mustang, but had to take all their wares to the Mustang Raja's palace at Lo Manthang, where his bailiffs

would purchase them or barter them for salt. Sometimes, however, they secretly sold some of their goods to friends in other villages. In return they received salt as well as wool. The salt they transported on the backs of sheep, not only as far as Nar, but also to the Gurung villages of Lamjung, where they bartered it for rice and other grain. Transport by pack-sheep was then the general practice in the Kali Gandaki region and most of Western Nepal, but with the drying up of the salt trade it came to an end, and the men of Nar and Phu have not used pack-sheep for the past 15 or 16 years.

Nowadays Nar people go to Mustang only to purchase yak and occasionally small quantities of Tibetan salt and wool for domestic use. In Mustang Tibetan salt costs Rs 12 per *pathi* while in Manang the price is Rs 21. A household with many yak needs annually about 60 *pathi* to feed to the yak. Indian salt is believed to be unsuitable for yak and is hence not bought, although in Chame it costs only Rs 8 per *pathi*.

The main trade of Nar and Phu is with Manang, Lamjung and the lowlands as far as Dumre. Nearly every man of Nar and Phu has a trade partner (*tokbu*) in Manang, and sometimes also in the villages of Pisang and Braga. Such a partner buys any yak a Nar or Phu man wants to sell, paying either in cash or in grain. The yak are almost invariably bought for slaughter and the meat is smoked to last through the following winter. Some of the purchasers agree to return to their trade partner the hide and the tail of the yak. With the purchase price the Nar people buy rice, wheat and buck-wheat, and sometimes also cloths and minor manufactured goods such as electric torches and batteries.

Some Manangbas come to Nar in order to buy butter. In the summer they cross the high Kang-La usually travelling on

horseback in bands of thirty to forty men. On such trading expeditions they purchase the entire stock of butter which the Nar people have kept for sale. The butter is needed for their own consumption and they do not sell it outside Manang.

Most of the trading partnerships between men of Manang and Nar or Phu continue from generation to generation, and thus link whole families in a permanent relationship which is to their mutual benefit. During the summer some people of Nar go to Manang and help in the construction of houses. For this work they get daily wages of Rs 15-20 plus food. They can take their wages in cash or, if they wish, in the shape of wheat or buckwheat.

In his *Himalayan Pilgrimage* (p. 227) David Snellgrove mentioned that the Manangbas had a monopoly on the trade with Nar and Phu, and did not allow their trade partners to sell their butter on any other market. The Nar men whom I asked about the nature of their trade with Manangbas denied that there was nowadays any element of compulsion and emphasized that they did business with Manang because that was the nearest source of wheat and buckwheat and above all a steady market for their yak which could not be taken to lower areas.

Another aspect of the trading activities of the people of Nar and Phu is the sale of their products in Lamjung, in other areas in the middle ranges and even in Kathmandu. During the winter many families leave their villages for $3\frac{1}{2}$ months and take yak-hair blankets, sacks, ropes, yak tails, spices and herbs used as incense to the Lamjung region where they peddle them in Gurung villages. Some men go as far as Kathmandu, where they stay in the houses of Manangbas friends or hire for a few days a room at Bodnath. In Kathmandu they sell blankets, boots and yak tails. A white yak tail fetches Rs 140 and a black one half that price. On their way back

they stay with friends in Lamjung and buy rice and maize to be carried to Nar. While they are in Lamjung they also earn cash by working as casual farm labourers or as porters. In this way they earn enough to maintain themselves and their families during the winter months and are enabled to purchase provisions to carry to Nar when they return in the spring.

There is a considerable difference between the caravan trade of such populations as the Bhotias of Humla and the trading activities of the Nar people. While the former are basically middlemen transporting with caravans of hundreds of sheep large quantities of Tibetan salt and Nepalese grain for resale, the latter sell their own products and buy commodities in relatively small quantities for their own consumption. As the main trading partners of Nar and Phu are the inhabitants of such nearby regions as Manang and Lamjung, the interruption of the trade with Tibet affected the people of these two villages far less than many of Nepal's other border populations whose economy was gravely disrupted when the barter of Nepalese goods for Tibetan salt and wool was brought to a sudden halt.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Unlike most tribal societies of Nepal, such as Gurungs, Magars and Thakalis many Bhotia communities have no clearly defined descent groups. Among the Sherpas only the inner core of society consists of named patrilineal clans while the accretions derived from immigrants from Tibet lack a comparable clan-system. Similarly no true clans are found among the Bhotias of Dolpo, and in Mustang hierarchically ranked groups are the most prominent elements of the social structure.

In Nar and Phu, on the other hand, there is no clear horizontal stratification of society, but there are named

groups based on patrilineal descent which have many of the characteristics of clans referred to in most Tibetan dialects as *ri*.⁴ Yet these groups called *gyuba*, a term which the Thakalis use for 'lineage' are somewhat distinct from proper clans, i.e. groups of people sharing common agnatic descent from recognized ancestors. Some are believed to have been formed by newcomers joining an existing *gyuba*, and hence being incorporated in an exogamous group, and others lack the recognition of an individual ancestor even though all the members of the *gyuba* conduct themselves as if they were agnatic kinsmen. While they are referred to as *gyuba* the term *phowe* is attached to the name of such groups, and *phowe* is the word for 'clan' in the dialect of Marpha in Thak Khola. The situation is further confused by the fact that each of the three exogamous groups has a name in the language of Nar, and another by which it is referred to in Nepali. Moreover one of the exogamous groups consists of two parts each of which has a different name. This may be illustrated by the following tabulation:

1. Nar phowe or Narpa,	Nepali name : Karkülama	24 houses
2. Er phowe or Ewa,	Nepali name : Bandilama	14 houses
3. Hrönden phowe Menden phowe	Nepali name : Gurulama	23 houses

Nar phowe, more often referred to as Narpa, claims to be descended from the founder of Nar village, a legendary figure supposed to have come from Mustang. According to oral tradition he came to the Nar valley while pursuing a blue sheep (*nar*) and when he saw the fertile soil, he sowed a handful of barley grains and resolved to settle there if they thrived.

4. For an analysis of the various meanings of *ri* see Nancy E. Levine "The Theory of *ri* Kinship, Descent and Status in a Tibetan Society" in C. von Fürer-Haimendorf (editor) *Asian Highland Societies*, Delhi 1981, pp. 52-78.

Returning after some months he found a splendid crop, and decided to make his home in so propitious a locality. According to another story the Nar phowe is descended from the legendary Karmapa Lama. The first settlers were three brothers, but these were later joined by immigrants from Kyirong.

At present three of the 24 households of the Nar phowe belong to a sub-clan known as Yur Tsangmo, and these three families are traced to more recent immigrants from Mustang. Illogically some members of these families, though considered full members of the Nar phowe have concluded marriages with men and women of the original Narpa families. This apparent breach of the rule of clan-exogamy seems to have occurred without arousing any condemnation on the part of the other clan-members.

The exogamous group known as Er phowe, in conversation abbreviated to Ewa, traces its descent to people believed to have come from Tseragang in Tibet. It is said that being late-comers they have no *gompa* of their own and worship in small chapels (*lha-khang*) situated in individual houses.

The third exogamous group consists of Hrönden phowe and Menden phowe and is known also as Gurulama or Mikhülama. The only explanation for the existence of two named parts of a single exogamous group is given in the following tale:

There was a man by name of Degothang who had three sons. The eldest was called Menden, the middle one Gratsang, and the youngest Hrönden. The father gave to the youngest son his house, and to the eldest son his fields. The middle son received no part of the property and hence complained to his father. So the father gave him a trap to catch blue sheep. With this he caught many blue sheep, thereby committing many sins. This angered the gods and so he died soon without

having founded a lineage (*gyuba*).⁵ As they are agnatic kinsmen all descended from Degothang, Hronden and Menden do not intermarry, and are like branches of one and the same clan. They share as equal partners one *gompa* known as Guru gompa, which they built jointly without the help of other villagers.

While all Nar people observe the ritual of the Nyingmapa sect of Buddhism Nar phowe adheres to the Ningdik branch and Hronden/Menden to the Changter subsect.

One of the clans of Nar is represented also in Phu. In that village there are three entirely different exogamous clans, namely:

Mojokden with 11 houses; Ongdzenden with 21 houses; and Ladakhden with 19 houses.

The Mojokden clan was the first to come from Tibet, and it is believed that Mojokden men founded Phu, at a time when the territory of Phu still belonged to Tibet. It was incorporated into Nepal only at the time of Jung Bahadur Rana.

The Mojokden clan claims to be identical with the Gale clan, one of the four high status clans of the Gurungs. Yet there is no intermarriage between Gurungs and the Phu clan equated with the Gale clan, nor have the Mojokden people any special relations with Gurungs of Lamjung.

The clans of Nar and Phu are corporate groups in the sense of owning jointly *chösing* land and in some cases also a *gompa* built by their members and exclusively used for the clan's ritual performances. In each clan there is a *nierpa*, a manager of clan-property and rituals. The position is held

5. The term *gyuba* seems to be derived from *brgyud*, the Tibetan term for 'lineage'.

in rotation, and the *nierpa* keeps a special accounts book, which the incumbent passes on to his successor when he relinquishes his office. The *nierpa* has to calculate the requirements for clan-rituals, and to collect contributions from clan-members to meet these requirements. In the month of Dawa Dumba each of the three Nar clan-groups holds a festival when the clan-deity is worshipped and the clan-members assemble on the roof of the largest house owned by one of them, and there eat and drink after the performance of the religious rites.

The clan-deity of Nar phowe is Gombu Manang, that of Er phowe Palden Lhamu, and that of Hrönden/Menden Tsakba Mela.

The individual clans are said to have separate *gompa* because their deities and their sects are different. In each of the clan *gompa* there is a sacristan (*konyer*), whose post is filled annually in rotation. He is responsible for the regular performance of acts of worship and keeps a register according to which he calls upon clan-members whose turn it is to offer butter-lamps.

When a general rite is performed in a clan-*gompa* other villagers are also allowed to attend. Thus when the important Niungne rite takes place in the Guru *gompa* participation is compulsory for Hrönden/Menden people, but members of Nar phowe and Er phowe attend only if they wish to do so.

In Phu there are also *gompa* built and maintained by the members of one clan, in addition to the Tashi *gompa* on a hill outside the village, where most of the village festivals are held.

Whereas descent in the clan is in principle patrilineal, there are circumstances in which persons not agnatically

linked with clan-members can be incorporated into a clan. Such a case has recently occurred in Nar. Pema Tshewang, the present *pradhan panch* (panchayat chairman), has come from Phu where he belonged to the Ongdzenden clan, and married into the family of a man of Er phowe as *makba* (resident son-in-law). For all practical purposes he acts like a man of Er phowe and his children will adopt the clan name of their mother, who is of Er phowe. Yet, they do not have lost all affiliation to their father's original clan. Thus a son of Pema Tshewang can neither marry a girl of Ongdzenden, which is his paternal clan, nor a girl of Er phowe, which is the clan of his mother. Thus he must seek his bride among the girls of Nar phowe or Hrönden/Menden phowe.

THE VILLAGE COUNCIL

The traditional authority of Nar is a council of seven members, collectively known as *gampa lenzing*, on which every clan is represented. The term *gampa*, used also among the Thakalis for 'clan-head', is clearly derived from the Tibetan *rgan pa* 'old man, headman'. The four senior members of the council are referred to as *gampa* and the three junior members as *sherpa* or *tso lenzing*. There is a register of eligible clan representatives and these serve on the council in rotation for one year at a time. Service on the council goes by rote and does not depend on ability or popularity. The composition of the council in May 1981 was as follows:

Gampa : Sriten Phurba (Er phowe), Garsang Do (Nar phowe),
Garsang Rhakne (Hrönden phowe), Pem Rinsen (Menden
phowe).

Sherpa: Karsang RHITE (Nar phowe), Nima Ongdi (Er phowe),
Sangmo Chösang (Menden phowe).

The *gampa lenzing* collect the land revenue from the villagers and pay it annually into the district treasury. They

also administer a fund from which the expenses of public rites are met and small payments are made to the senior lamas conducting the performance. The village fund can be used for the bulk purchases of commodities such as rice or wheat which are then sold to the villagers at a small profit. Receipts from the sale of timber extracted by Phu men from the forest belonging to Nar are also paid into this fund, which serves moreover as a source of small loans to villagers in case of emergencies. A register of all the householders of the village, called *nietsang*, is kept in the house of one of the *gampa*.

When there is a dispute among villagers the four *gampa* try to settle it and then call together all the household heads to endorse their decision. If a settlement cannot be achieved, the dispute is supposed to be referred to the official district panchayat, but such an eventuality has not yet arisen. In the old days before the introduction of the district administration and the present panchayat system, the *gampa lenzing* exercised jurisdiction over all criminal cases with the exception of murder, which had to be referred to the Bara Hakim at Pokhara. In cases of theft the councillors fined the offender and in the event of the abduction of a married woman, the guilty man had to pay a fine into the fund of the *gampa lenzing* and in addition compensation to the aggrieved husband.

In Phu village there are only five *gampa lenzing*; two of these are *gampa* and three are *tso lenzing*.

In addition to the council of the *gampa lenzing* there is a further body, known as *soba*, consisting of six men who control the sale of certain commodities. In 1981 three of the *gampa* belonged also to this committee. At that time the *soba* council had fixed the prices for timber, grass, rakshi, *chang* (beer) and eggs. I was unable to discover whether the *soba* watched over

the prices of any commodities in short supply, and my informants mentioned only these five items.

Whereas the councils of *gampa lenzing* and *soba* control only the affairs of their own villages, there is a more comprehensive authority known as Mano-Chhachhum Khuwa, which extends over the whole of Manang. Every village of the district is represented on this council, and traditionally it is the council of Manang village which leads the representatives of the smaller villages, such as Nar and Phu, when the land revenue has to be paid at the district headquarters.

Other institutions serving the coordination of the activities of the villagers are the *dzomba*, groups of unmarried boys or girls who are responsible for the organization of dances and entertainments during the Lhosar festival at the beginning of the year. Each *dzomba*, consists either of boys or of girls who are usually of different clans, and it has a leader elected informally from among the members, and the parents of the leader put one room at his disposal to be used for the meetings of the group. A *dzomba* functions only for three or four days, and is dissolved at the end of the festival.

INTER-VILLAGE RELATIONS

Apart from the trade relations Nar has institutional connections with villages of Manang and Khingar, the latter being in Baragaon. An annual festival known in Nar as Yaktsa, in Manang as Baden, and in Khingar as Dungden, is performed in rotation by these three villages. For this festival which is held in December/January wooden statues of three gods are carved, and these statues are finally placed into a *gampa* of the host village. During this festival all villagers above 15 years of age must stay in the village and anyone absenting

himself or herself is fined. Attendance of people from the two other villages is optional and the blockage of routes by snow sometimes makes it impracticable. The festival lasts for seven days and of these three days are set aside for worship and the burning of butter-lamps, while throughout the celebration there is dancing and drinking, and young men engage in horse racing. The Nar people believe that if they gave up the celebration of the Yaktse the gods would be angry and many people would die.

There is no ritual expression of an alleged link between Nar and the village of Tetang in Baragaon. The people of Tetang believe that in the distant past there was a village known as Tangya east of Lo-Manthang, and the ruins of that village can still be seen. The story goes that at the time of the disbandment of Tangya one part of the population settled at Tetang whereas the other part moved to Nar. I was told of this tradition by Krishna Lal Thakali after I had left Nar, and hence had no opportunity to find out whether the tradition was known also in Nar. It had certainly not been mentioned when I discussed with Nar men the question of their origin. They did say that the first settlers in Nar had come from Mustang, but did not mention any relationship with the people of Tetang.

FAMILY STRUCTURE

Among the people of Nar and Phu the nuclear family is the main unit of production and consumption. Each married couple is supposed to have a house of its own, and there is no tradition of joint families sharing permanently a house and the use of land. A newly wed couple may temporarily be accommodated in the house of the parents of either spouse, but this is usually only an interim solution to last till a separate house has been constructed or purchased. The one

exception to this rule is the absorption of a *makba* (resident son-in-law) into the household of his wife's elderly father or mother who needs to be looked after and helped with the work of cultivation and herding.

In contradistinction to most Bhotia communities of Nepal, the people of Nar and Phu practise neither polyandry nor polygyny. This is remarkable considering that polyandry is widespread in Tibet as well as in the villages of nearby Baragaon and Mustang. The absence of polyandry may possibly be due to a substratum of Gurungs in the population of Nar and Phu. Cross-consin marriages are common.

There is no preferred marriage age. Some parents arrange the marriages of their children long before they have reached puberty, but in such cases only the first stage of the marriage ceremonies known as *rikchang* is performed and if the young people do not grow fond of each other the union is easily dissolved. The parents of the boy or the girl who insisted on the dissolution must repay the costs incurred by the other party in the celebration of the *rikchang*. No permanent union can be established without the performance of the *rikchang*, and even if a boy and a girl elope the *rikchang* has ultimately to be performed.

In 1981 there was in Nar no couple living in a common household as man and wife, whose *rikchang* had not been celebrated. But there were three couples for whom only the *rikchang* had been performed. Two of them had as yet no children, but one of the couples had one son and two daughters. If after the performance of the *rikchang* another man abducts the girl, he has to pay half of the expenditure of the *rikchang* to the man deprived of his spouse.

The *rikchang* is a simple ceremony comparable to the *demchang* of the Sherpas. The relatives of bride and groom

meet in the house of the bride's parents, and the groom's party brings scarfs (*katag*), beer, and some money, which is given to the bride's father.

After one year or even longer the real wedding, known as *tsang-zan-khen* is performed. During the interval the bride and the young man stay in their respective parents' houses, but they visit each other and may sleep together. Hence it is not unusual that children are born before the final wedding rite.

The *tsang-zan-khen* is performed in the bridegroom's house. The bride is fetched from her father's house, and carried on a man's back like a child. Her parents ride on horses, and when the procession arrives at the groom's house, lamas throw *liu tormo* out of the house, and then consult a horoscope to discover what food the bride should be given before entering the house. Then all the guests go into the house, and inside the formal wedding rite is performed. All the villagers come and offer *katag* and beer, and the couple's relatives give ornaments to the bride. A lama and one old man of the village bless the couple by putting butter on their heads. The guests then dance in the house that day and the next day. The expense of providing food and drink during these days is borne by the bridegroom. The feasting continues for a third day when relatives of the bride bring food and drink, and also offer advice to the young couple.

Once a married couple is installed in a separate house husband and wife function as equal partners. Both share the work of agriculture and herding, and many wives accompany their husbands on their trading trips. It is mainly the wives who produce such trade goods as yak hair blankets and woollen materials, while the men take the leading role in negotiations about the sale of livestock. The control of

the household affairs is largely in the hands of the women, whereas decisions about agricultural activities and the disposition of herds are mainly made by men. The two fields in which men are clearly dominant are the village government and the performance of religious rites.

The relatively favourable position of women finds expression in the rules of inheritance. A concrete case may demonstrate their implementation. When a wealthy lama of Nar died the entire property remaining after a share had gone to the eldest son in his father's life time went to the widow. She gave half of it to her younger sons and kept half for herself. Out of this half share she gave some to her younger married daughter in whose house she lived and also gave some property to her elder, also married daughter.

If during a man's life time none of his property had been given to any of his sons, equal shares are given to the sons and the widow. A daughter may either marry and get her share in the form of dowry, or she may stay in the house of one of her brothers where she will be maintained. The widow will normally stay alternately with her sons. When the widow dies her share is either divided between the sons, or if there is a *lha-khang* in the family her property is set aside for its maintenance.

In so far as premarital sexual relations are concerned Nar and Phu society is as permissive as most Bhotia societies. Boys and girls have great freedom, and I was told that in the summer when the young men are in the high pastures, they often run or ride to Nar in the evening, and sleep with their girl friends, who at that time usually make their bed in the open verandas on the roof tops. Some parents know what is going on and do not object, but others try to catch and abuse the young men. Boys and girls give each other presents without

their parents' knowledge, and they try to keep the girl's parents in the dark for fear that the parents may try to force their daughter into an arranged marriage.

The dissolution of a marriage is easy if husband and wife do not get on and agree to part company. But infidelity is not necessarily a cause for divorce. If a wife has a love-affair and the husband learns of her adultery he will find her lover but condone his wife's conduct provided she has not left the marital home.

Illegitimate children are known as *nyaluk*, and in view of the general sexual permissiveness it is not surprising that their number is fairly large. In 1981 there were nine *nyaluk* among the population of Nar. If an unmarried girl becomes pregnant the father of the child must perform a *lhapsang* rite in the only Bonpo chapel still existing in Nar. This must be done in the first three months of the pregnancy, and the cost of the rite is about Rs 50. In addition he must present one scarf (*katag*) and some *chang* to the owner of the same chapel, which is in the house of a family which used to be Bonpo, but has recently changed over to Nyingmapa Buddhism.

The *gampa lenzing* make no effort to persuade the child's father to marry the pregnant girl, and if he is a married man this would not be practical according to Nar custom. An illegitimate girl takes the clan-name of her mother. Such a girl is not debarred from marrying or from becoming a nun.

Although there is no overt discrimination against *nyaluk*, the incidence of illegitimacy seems to run in families. In some genealogies which I recorded the majority of the persons were of illegitimate birth and it was explained to me that there are lineages (*gyuba*) which are prone to witchcraft, and that girls of such lineages find it difficult to be properly married and hence tend to have illegitimate children. It is

the fear of parents that their sons might fall in love with such girls and want to marry them, which induces parents to get their sons married at an early age to girls of untainted parentage.

WITCHES

The belief in witches is widespread among the Bhotia populations of Nepal, but the great prevalence of persons regarded as witches in Nar is exceptional and the social repercussions of witchcraft beliefs far greater than in any of the Bhotia communities I have hitherto studied. A comparison with the Sherpas' belief in witches may demonstrate this difference. In *The Sherpas of Nepal* (London 1964, p. 263) I wrote:

"A witch is known as a *pem* or *sondim*, and normally it is only women who develop the power and urge to harm others through the invisible influence of their mind (*sem*) while they are still alive. No woman is ever born as a *pem*, but she may turn into a witch through envy, jealousy and evil thoughts and deeds. The *sem* of such a woman can act independently of her body, and is believed not to be fully under the control of her consciousness. Thus it is thought that the *sem* of a witch may visit other places and attack people, not only when she is asleep, but even while she is awake and at work. While the woman developing such powers is aware of her nature as a *pem*, she is believed not to be conscious and in control of all the doings of her *sem*. Thus the condition of a witch may be regarded as an affliction comparable to the evil eye rather than as a wilful manipulation of malignant forces. Yet, no good-natured woman kindly disposed towards her fellow-villagers is in danger of turning into a witch. This process is always set in motion by a wilful malicious act or persistent evil thoughts. Of one well-known witch of Khumjung it was said, for instance, that she became a *pem* when

she poisoned some of her relations, and even her nearest kinsmen were so afraid of her that they did not dare accept food in her house."

In Nar a male witch is called *mang* and a female witch *mangmu*. The same terms are used also by the Thakalis of Thak Khola but to my knowledge neither by Tibetans or Gurungs. But according to a personal communication from Dr. Kathryn March the Tamangs of Rasuwa and Dhading districts use the composite term *mang-mangmu* to describe evil forces in general without reference to witches. The people of Nar say that those men and women who have malignant feelings and intentions become *mang* and *mangmu*, and one of my lama informants told me that he could see from a person's face whether he or she was a witch. A witch is believed to harm people of whom she is jealous, and an inclination to envy is considered one of the characteristics of witches. A lama may be able to control the evil power of an individual witch, usually by the recitation of *mantra*. When the outbreak of disease is attributed to the action of witches, lamas try to counteract this by making a *lu tormo* and throwing it out with the appropriate ritual. But they are incapable of ridding the village of the malignant influences of all the witches among the inhabitants once and for good.

The belief in the power of witches is linked with the concept of *gyaptak*, a spirit attached to an individual or a whole family. All beings, men and animals, have a *gyaptak* inside them, and if they have evil sentiments their *gyaptak* turns them into witches. A *gyaptak* may manifest itself as benign or malignant. It is believed that when a lama who has committed many sins dies, he turns into an evil *gyaptak*, whereas a man who knows nothing about *dharma* may sin without creating an evil force. It is only those who know about *dharma* and yet do wrong, who become dangerous after death.

The evil force harboured by a *mangmu* acts independently of her while she is asleep, and may cause damage, raise fires or make people ill. *Mang* and *mangmu* are conscious of their condition, but can do little about it. Even by doing such meritorious works as building *chorten*, repairing *gompa*, or commissioning *kurim* or other religious rites they cannot rid themselves of their evil propensity. Yet such good works may help them to attain a better reincarnation.

The peculiar aspect of the Nar belief in witches is the assumption that their evil nature is hereditary in certain lineages (*gyuba*) and that good *gyuba* never contain witches, whereas in bad *gyuba* witches occur frequently. The head-lama of Nar explained to me that originally most of the lineages of Nar were 'good', but that from the very beginning there were also some 'bad' lineages. As people mixed with them the corruption had spread and now nearly half of the lineages had become bad. To avoid infection people do not drink from the same cup with persons suspected of being witches, and they also do not marry them. If a man of untainted lineage married a girl of a bad lineage he and their eventual children would be of the same suspect nature as his wife. He would have to be separated from his natal family because even his closest relatives would fear the contagion which he would henceforth carry.

The lama added that there were now so many illegitimate children because people of bad *gyuba* cannot find husbands for their daughters. The head-lama thought that half of the lineages of Nar had already become bad, and that ultimately the majority of the lineages would be affected with the result that people would be quarrelling, beating each other and fighting, and care only for money.

Other lamas were less pessimistic and thought that only

about one third of the lineages had a tendency to produce witches.

When I raised the question of witches in Phu, the people of the village said spontaneously that Nar was "full of witches", but maintained that in their own village there were only one of two.

There is a general belief that men of 'bad' *gyuba* can never become lamas, because their thoughts are bad and they have the urge to inflict damage on men and animals.

The bad lineages of Nar must not be confused with the underprivileged class of Sherpas, known as *khamendu* ("those not of the same mouth"), for these are of inherently impure condition, rather like the untouchable castes of Hindu society, whereas the tainted character of 'bad' Nar lineages stems from their association with witches.

A much more detailed investigation of the fortunes of individual *mang* and *mang-mu* would be required to clarify the intriguing problem of the social role of those suspected of being witches. The statement of the head-lama that nearly half of the lineages of Nar are affected by the evil of witchcraft is not easily reconciled with the smooth functioning of the social institutions based on the cooperation of all villagers according to a system of rotation without regard to personal qualifications. My stay in Nar was not long enough to investigate this problem in depth particularly as I became aware of the prevalence of witches only a few days before my departure.

RELIGION

The people of Nar and Phu are Buddhists and their religious practices are closely intertwined with many aspects of

their community life. There is also a certain correspondence between the complexity of the social structure resulting from a series of immigrations at different times and from different directions, and the variety of strands in the religious establishment. Unlike such Bhotia groups as the Sherpas, who adhere exclusively to the Nyingmapa sect, the inhabitants of Nar and Phu have been under the influence of several manifestations of Buddhism. It would seem that at one time most of the *gompa* of Nyeshang including Nar were staffed by lamas of the Kargyupa sect. Lama Nyetak, the aged head-lama of Nar was originally of Kargyupa persuasion but later changed over to Nyingmapa and learnt to perform the *tsho*-rite according to the Nyingmapa liturgy. This change-over, for which I was given no explanation is all the more remarkable as Lama Nyetak is the eighth in a line of Kargyupa lamas who held the hereditary position of head-lama of Nar. A similar change occurred in the Drewa *gompa*, the clan-*gompa* of the Nar phowe. Until three generations ago this *gompa* was Kargyupa, but at that time there was a lack of experienced lamas in Nar, and the clansmen found in Manang a learned Nyingmapa lama by name of Tshödak Dorje, and invited him to Nar. He had originally come from Tibet and he introduced Nyingmapa ritual in the Drewa *gompa*.

There are no celibate monks (*thawa*) in Nar and the village *gompa* does not have the character of a monastery where lamas live and devote themselves predominantly to the practice of religion. But though it is in the nature of a temple used only for the celebration of specific rites, the community of those engaged in ritual performances is structured on the lines of monastic communities such as we find in true monasteries. The undisputed head of the *gompa*, simply referred to as 'lama' is Lama Nyetak. Next to him ranks the *loben* and below the latter the *wmse*. In most *gompa* there is only one *wmse*, whose task it is to lead the recitation of prayers, but

in Nar there are twelve *umse*. They are appointed according to their seniority among 42 *ngawa*, lay lamas who have studied under the head-lama sufficiently long to enable them to recite the sacred scriptures and participate in the *gompa* ritual by playing musical instruments, fashioning *torma*, arranging the offerings to the gods and performing ritual dances. Promotion to the rank of *umse* is an expensive honour. The candidate must invite all the lamas to a great celebration in the *gompa* and commission a Wang rite. The feeding of lamas and the performance of rites may cost him several thousand rupees but it seems that the promotion is rarely declined. Apart from *lama*, *loben* and *umse* there are two further office bearers known as *tshötung*. Their function is to maintain discipline in the *gompa* and in this respect they resemble the *gerku* of most monasteries. They as well as *chorpen* (giver of offerings) and *konyer* (sacristan) assume office in rotation according to seniority.

Though these office bearers have a special interest in the activities of the *gompa* its maintenance is the responsibility of the entire village community. The Nar *gompa* was last repaired in 1979. There was no subsidy from government, and the villagers contributed their own labour as well as cash and provisions. Each household gave about one *muri* of barley, which was used for feeding the workers, and on an average Rs 100 in cash, the rich giving more and the poor less. Contributions were also solicited from people in Manang and two Nar men went to Kathmandu and approached Manangbas living there. Rs 6000 were obtained from these two sources, and the total amount collected inside and outside the village was between Rs 20,000 and 30,000. The villagers went and cut timber in the forest below Metta. This was transported to Nar partly on the backs of yak, and partly dragged and carried by teams of men. Carpenters of Nar did most of the wood carving, and Rinsing Pasang, a villager

skilled in moulding terra-cotta made the statues of gods and demons. Two painters from Manang were employed to paint the statues, but by 1981 the walls of the *gompa* had not yet been painted and the people talk of inviting a lama from Nubri to paint the wood-work and the walls.

Nar was not always a homogeneous Buddhist community for not long ago there were 19 Bonpo households in the village. Such remnants of this ancient pre-Buddhist religion persist also in Thak Khola, Baragaon and Dolpo, and its occurrence in Nar is hence in no way surprising. Yet, the Bonpo faith is here undoubtedly on the way out, and the last survivals may vanish within a few decades. In Nar there are still two Bonpo families, but the last practising Bonpo lama died some 17 years ago. His name was Kara Wongdi of Nar phowe and in his house there is still a Bonpo *lha-khang*, referred to by the villagers as the Bonpo *gompa* which is now owned by his eldest son's son Tsiring Tsewang. This boy's father the son of Kara Wongdi, died at an early age, and as he had not been able to teach the boy the Bonpo liturgy Tsiring Tsewang studied under the head-lama and was hence brought up in the Nyingmapa faith. In 1981 there was, however, a younger son of Kara Wongdi alive, and though this elderly man lived in another house he sometimes came to the Bonpo *lha-khang* and performed Bonpo rites. The *lha-khang* was opened only once a month, because Bonpo divinities are believed to be very dangerous.

The Bonpo *lha-khang* contains a carved altar with three statues the central of which represents Shenrab. Below the statues there is a painted panel on which a fierce figure is depicted. A bow and an arrow hang on one of the pillars and there is also a spear. On the first day of the tri-annual Yaktsa festival all the villagers come to this *lha-khang*, and offer dough figures of a yak and a sheep. As long as the Bonpo faith was flourishing a yak and a sheep were sacrificed

and their blood offered in this *lha-khang*, but now the killing of these animals is done only symbolically. The *lha-khang* was built by Yur Nima, a Bonpo lama from Muktinath, who was the father's brother of Kara Wongdi.

There is a tradition that men from Lubra in Baragaon, now the site of a large and famous Bonpo *gompa* and a centre of Bonpo learning and worship⁶ came to Nar to learn about the local Bonpo ritual. In connection with the ritual they wanted to perform a human sacrifice and selected the son of a widow as the victim. But the mother prevailed upon them to substitute a yak for the boy. Thereafter yak were sacrificed in the course of Bon rites, but when this proved to be too expensive a yak calf was sacrificed instead. But the calf's mother kept looking for her calf, and when the people saw how distressed she was they realized that even the killing of a calf was sinful and stopped the practice of sacrificing any living being. Instead they offered 100 butter lamps and asked the Bonpo god to accept this in place of an animal. The god agreed and ever since the offering of 100 lamps (*tsogya*) is being performed in the month of Dawa Ngawa and again in Dawa Guva. At the time of the barley harvest in that month offerings of butter-lamps are being made to the Bonpo deities. Buddhists and Bonpos seem to have lived in harmony in Nar, and the few Bonpos still remaining in the village join the other members of the community in some of the Buddhist *gompa* services. In the eyes of the average layman there is probably not much more difference between Buddhist and Bonpo ritual than there is between that of the Nyingmapa and Kargyupa sects. Learned lamas, however are well aware of the difference, and one such lama explained to me that there are two types of Bonpo. The black Bonpo are in the habit of

6. Cf. C. von Furer-Haimendorf, "Social Change in a Himalayan Region", in J.S. Lall (editor), *The Himalaya. Aspects of Change*, Oxford University Press, Delhi 1981, p. 193.

sacrificing animals to their gods and for that reason cannot attain a good reincarnation. The white Bonpo do not perform blood sacrifices, but as they are ignorant of the right manner of praying they cannot expect a fortunate fate in their next life either. According to that informant all Bonpos, black and white alike, think only of this life, and how to attain wealth and happiness. As they do not think of the next life, their rebirth cannot be an auspicious one.

These, of course, are the views of a Buddhist, and the very fact that Buddhists as well as Bonpos have to present offerings in the Bonpo *lha-khang* of Nar to expiate such trespasses as causing the pregnancy of an unmarried girl, shows that even today the power of Bonpo gods is by no means discounted. There is also a festival referred to as *kang-dze* and celebrated in Dawa Tukpa (July/August) which is centred on the Bonpo *lha-khang* and is not performed in any of the Buddhist *gompa*. It seems that adherents of the Bonpo faith have always been confined to members of the Narpa clan.

The people of Nar and Phu are familiar with the concept of reincarnation and show great respect to any reincarnate lama (*tulku*) whom they may encounter on their journeys. Yet there has never been a *tulku* resident in either of the two villages, and succession to the position of head-lama of Nar is by inheritance in the male line and not by reincarnation.

It has happened, however, that children born in Nar have claimed to be reincarnations of ordinary villagers in other localities. Such a child was usually born on the same day on which a person -- often also a child -- had died in another place. Thus in 1981 there was in Nar an unmarried girl who was regarded as the reincarnation of a Gurung girl. When she was a child her parents took her to the village of her supposed former incarnation, and the parents of the Gurung

girl believed to be reborn in her gave her gifts of clothes and ornaments. But this remained the only contact she had with the family of her alleged former birth and she never returned to that Gurung village.

Another variation of the belief in rebirth is known as *tshelak*. A person who dies accidentally and prematurely may be reborn but live in his new life only as many years as he would have continued to live in his former life if it had not been cut short by misadventure. When during my stay in Nar a girl of ten died unexpectedly, the lamas discovered that her's was a case of *tshelak*, and that she had died so young because from her previous life only a balance of ten years had remained.

That particular girl was buried in a shallow grave dug in the bed of the stream below Nar and covered with heavy stones. But the usual way of disposing of the corpse of an adult is by carrying it to a hill-side at some distance from the village and cutting it into pieces with a *kukri*. The pieces of flesh are placed on rocks and lamas attract the attention of vultures and birds of prey by chanting and drumming. The mourners wait at the site until vultures have swept down and begun to feast on the pieces of flesh.

The time I could spend in Nar and Phu was too short to allow me to observe the performance of the various seasonal rites, and regrettably also of the important Dardze festival held in Dawa Tukpa (July/August) which corresponds to the Yatun festival celebrated about the same time at Muktinath. In preparation for the Dardze three men are selected as *nierpa*, and it is their responsibility to collect rice and other provisions and to brew *chang* for the entire gathering. Three unmarried boys and three girls are appointed to organize the dancing. As at the Yatun there are horse-races, and all the participants dress up in their best clothes.

The following rites, which I did watch while in Nar, may serve as examples of the type of rituals performed by lamas of Nar as part of the seasonal celebrations dovetailing with the agricultural cycle.

Previous to the first ploughing and sowing a ceremony is performed on the field where the founder of Nar is believed to have first sowed barley, which grew into a miraculous crop. The head-lama and two other senior lamas prepared on this field an altar, and then sat behind this low altar on a mat and began the recitation of a book called *Doten*. A large wooden dish with barley seed indicated the connection of the rite with the beginning of the sowing.

When the three lamas had completed their recitation and the seed barley in a wooden vessel had been blessed, the villagers came to receive their blessings. First two women from the household of the field's owner arrived, carrying rice-balls and a *torma* made of sticky rice. They offered these and some beer to the lamas, and in return the head-lama took up his book and touched each woman's head with one of its corners and then anointed the woman's head with butter.

Then villagers came in family groups, all bringing juniper branches to be blessed. Each such branch was put up in a field, so that by the end of the day many fields were adorned with sprigs of such sacred trees. The villagers brought mostly beer and plates full of *tsampa* for the lamas and they all received the same type of blessing. By the end of the rite there were more than sixty people milling around the seated lamas, for a representative of each of the 61 houses had to attend the rite, and from many houses more than one member had come to receive the lamas' blessing.

Two weeks later, after the completion of the ploughing and sowing, a rite known as *gyepchi* was performed in the village

gompa. This rite extends over three days, but most of the first two days was taken up with preparations such as the cleaning of the *gompa* and the making of *torma*, the dough figures which play an essential part in all Buddhist ritual. In the morning of the second day a few lamas began some recitations in the main hall of the *gompa* but there was no full-scale chanting with musical accompaniment.

In the adjoining *gompa* kitchen more practical preparations for the festivities went ahead in the mean time. Rice contributed by the villagers was being measured, and the *torma*-makers proceeded with the modelling of the main *torma* representing the evil forces which were to be exorcised and banished from Nar. On this occasion this *torma* consisted not of a single figure, but of a couple in sexual union riding on a horse. It was called Polü-Molü, and there was the suggestion that previously two different figures had been made, and that these two were called Polü and Molü.

This composite *torma* stood on a wooden ring which in turn was put on an iron stand and then placed into a roughly rectangular basket. This basket was moved into the *gompa* hall and put down in front of the main altar. It was then filled with numerous tiny *torma* mainly moulded of dark brown dough and representing evil forces. But there were also some made of light coloured dough, and these had the shape of *chorten* and symbolized benevolent forces.

When it got dark many of the lamas gathered in the *gompa*, the head-lama took his seat close to the altar, and recitations accompanied by three large drums, cymbals, hand-bells and telescopic horns began in right earnest. Butter lamps were lighted, and the lamas read by the light of splinters of pine-wood and pieces of some large fungus soaked in oil.

Much of the following day was taken up by a similar

service, during which helpers brought small quantities of *tsampa*, partly placing it on the altar and partly filling it into the cups standing on the low tables in front of the lamas, who mixed it with tea to sustain themselves during the long proceedings.

At last one of the lamas dressed up in a dark brown garment with long pointed sleeves and a round hat surmounted by a stylized *vajra*. He began to dance in front of the *torma* representing evil forces and threatened the evil spirits with his magical dagger (*dorje*). This dancer is called *tam-dzen*, and he was later joined by other black-head dancers called *shenak*. Finally he picked up the Polü-Molü *torma* and another man grasped a red, pyramidical *torma*, and both these were placed in the courtyard in front of the *gompa* porch. Next lamas in the costume of *shenak*, wearing round black hats, burst out of the *gompa*, and danced round the *torma*. They were joined by dancers wearing the wooden masks which are normally hanging up on the pillars of the *gompa*. After a few minutes several young men in a bizarre attire came running from the village and joined the dance. Their nude bodies were smeared with ash, and to their belts they had fastened cow-bells and red tassels.

Finally the whole crowd of dancers moved down to the village, and in an open space formed a circle and moved clockwise round and round the evil *torma*. The semi-nude men carried branches of a thorny bush no doubt as means of driving out the evil spirits. In the centre of the circle were the two *torma* and two lamas blowing telescopic horns. Finally the villagers formed a compact round and lamas pelted them with sand brought in a large basket. This sand had stood in the *gompa* throughout the proceedings and it was thought that, thereby blessed, this sand served to purify the villagers of all evils and afflictions.

Finally the gathering broke up, and groups of lamas rushed into the four directions carrying *torma* to be thrown away. The two main *torma* were taken to the eastern end of the village and there left to the attention of crows. By that time it was snowing and lamas and layfolk alike sought the shelter of their houses.

THE GOMPA OF PHU

In Phu there are two *gompa*, one in the centre of the village known as Yül *gompa*, and one on a hill just above the newer part of the village, known as Tangrin *gompa*. Neither of these has an establishment of office bearers comparable to that of the main *gompa* of Nar. For in Phu religious activities are nowadays concentrated in Tashi *gompa*, a proper monastery situated beyond a stream on a bare hill at a small distance from the village.

As one approaches Tashi *gompa* one is faced by a row of 12 *chorten* painted red and white and each topped by a large prayer flag. This row is broken by a mound of carved *mane* stones. The *gompa* buildings occupy an elongated terrace, and a small gate leads into a narrow courtyard. From this one gains access to the main hall decorated with newly painted frescoes in rather garish colours. They are the work of the present abbot who is a painter of some skill. Some 23 years ago Lama Sonam, a Tibetan from Kham, came to Phu and as there was then no lama in charge of the *gompa*, he was asked to stay and occupy the vacant seat. He had impressed the people of Phu not so much by his religious stature as by his achievements as an artist. He is married and his wife, son and daughter-in-law also live in the monastery. The son, who has also been trained as a lama, teaches a number of novices, mainly small boys from Phu. Neither Lama Sonam nor his son have taken the *rabdzung* vow or attained the status of *gelung*.

But Sonam Lhendup, a prominent lama of Braga *gompa* in Manang had administered to three young monks the *rabdzung* vow and later ordained them as *gelung*. There are also nine young lamas, including novices, without rank or ordination. For the main festivals the village lamas of Phu go to Tashi gompa and participate in the ritual.

Although in the Nar-Phu region and indeed in the whole of Manang there is no major Buddhist centre comparable to a monastery such as Tengboche in Khumbu or the great monasteries in Mustang, the high percentage of literate and religiously competent men is remarkable in economically backward communities such as Nar and Phu. In the Nar *gompa* I watched on several occasions twenty and more lamas spending many hours reciting Tibetan sacred texts. One could hardly imagine to find in a remote Italian or Spanish village twenty peasants able to read and recite long sections of Latin liturgy, yet classical Tibetan is certainly as different from the Nar language as Latin is from an Italian or Spanish dialect.

No less surprising is the effort put by the villagers of Nar and Phu into the maintenance and restoration of religious buildings.

In Phu Nima Motu and another lama invited me to climb up to the Tangrin (white) gompa which stands high above the village. The ascent is extremely steep and as I arrived I realized that the *gompa* is in a state of restoration and not at all in use. Nima Motu's line of lamas has been connected with this *gompa* for six generations, and he seems to be the driving spirit behind the restoration work. This was begun three years ago and much of the wood-work, including the carving of the main posts and pillars has been completed. While the restoration is going on all the statues and images have been stored on the flat roof and covered with yak-hair

material such as is used for tents.

As every piece of timber required for the reconstruction has to be brought up from the forest below Metta, a tremendous effort is required to collect the building materials. The villagers of Phu have been engaged in this task for nearly three years, and although the main structural work has been completed, there remains much to be done. It is planned to cover the mud floor with wooden floor-boards, and alone the transport of these boards will take many men days. Then the shelves for the books will have to be made, as well as the altar on which to place the many statues and images. Finally the lamas hope to have the walls painted and this too will be a costly enterprise. One must admire these people living on the fringes of the oecumene for adding to their struggle for bare existence the maintenance of so many religious buildings.

The research in Nar and Phu on which the above notes are based was done jointly by Charlotte Hardman and myself, and in such cooperation it is difficult to decide precisely which parts of the information were obtained by each partner. Though in writing this paper I have used exclusively data contained in my own diary and notebooks, I gratefully acknowledge the insight which Charlotte Hardman contributed in the many discussions of our experiences while we were in the field.