THE SHAMAN'S CURE AND THE LAYMAN'S INTERPRETATION*

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Preamble to a point of method[1]

The shaman of this article belongs to the Limbu community of eastern Nepal. He was born sometime in the 1880s and died in 1957, which means that he lived at a time when the changes, the Indianization taking place in the far eastern part of Nepal, had not yet directly sapped the vitality of Limbu shamanism. This is evident in the considerable power attributed him by his entourage, the enormous responsibility with which they vested him. The following accounts were collected some twelve years after his death. They come from relatives, former clients, neighbors, sometimes enemies; I did not know him personally.

This particular shaman, whom I shall call Pirtung, was a *phedāṅgmā*.[2] That is, to use the accepted Limbu terminology, a "tribal priest" rather than a "medium", someone connected with "ordinary rituals", those of the life cycle: birth, marriage and natural death; the ancestor cult and cults of local

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[2] See Sagant 1976a:64-65; 1982:164.

gods, important agricultural dates, etc. This type of religious officiant is distinct from and complementary to the other major category of Limbu shamans, the *yā* (*yābā* or *yąmā*, depending on the sex), *bijuwā* in Nepalese: the latter officiates in everything that touches on the "extraordinary": death by violence, incest, lightning, attacks by the Buzzard and the Wildcat, witches of the Other World.[3] In fact, however, apart from these complementary specialisations, the functions of the two shamans overlap: and this is my main concern here; the shaman's capacity to cure as well as to kill.

There is one point in particular on which this article may contribute something new. Until now, the various Nepal specialists have dealt mainly with the shaman himself, and, to a lesser extent, with his clients. We know from Levi-Strauss, however, that, for a cure to be successful, there are, of course, the shaman and his client, but also the community in which they live. C. J. Miller seems to be one of the few to address himself to this question. He emphasizes the numerous interpretations that Thami healers, close neighbors of the Limbu, come up with for a single manifestation of the gods' power. The same applies to Limbu shamans.[4] For a given illness where several healers may be called in successively, it is a rare day when each does not have a different idea of what is causing the trouble. The first attributes the illness to an attack of the tiger spirit , the next to a witch, etc. And yet, as the account shows, this diversity of hypotheses does not last long, something that Miller foresaw, moreover. This is the starting point of the cure, so to speak. The village community soon seizes upon the varying opinions and begins to examine them. In the long or short term - two weeks, a year -, a consensus emerges. the community finally decides that one of the shamans was right and the others wrong. It recognizes his clairvoyance. It retains his as the only true divination. Laymen, then, go through a process in which the patient himself plays a principal role, if he survives. This process combines with the diagnoses proposed by the religious practitioners. Perhaps what is important in the following accounts is to capture this interpretation in the making, the emerging consensus. To my mind, this element should be taken into consideration in any methodology.

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[3] See Sagant 1973a.

[4] Levi-Strauss 1958: 218; Miller 1979: 3, 17-17,44.

The essential act in the shaman's healing activity is to attribute the responsibility for an illness to a specific spirit. But why one spirit rather than another? Why a tiger rather than a witch, why the local god rather than the return of a dead man? Why are not all spirits the same? I personally believe that the gift of a great shaman lies entirely in his ability to "see". That is, in being able, at a given time and in a particular situation, to associate a misfortune with a spirit. In other words, "why one spirit rather than another" is the important question in determining the effectiveness of a cure. It is true that there are a number of difficulties in accepting this idea. First of all, certain methods of divination - counting grains of rice to see if the total is even or odd, scrutinizing an animal's liver, etc. - seem so mechanical that the ensuing diagnosis can only be the result of purest chance. And then, there are shamans and *shamans*. There are great shamans, "those who can see", and there are the rest, the majority, who have no basic understanding and who rely on chance, hoping that the gods will inspire their divinations. What distinguishes the clairvoyant? We find it especially hard to accept the idea that the connection a great shaman establishes between an illness and a spirit can make sense at all. Finally, it is difficult to understand that a good diagnosis is in itself capable of setting off a cure. All of these factors raise problems.

Here is where I come to the question of method that I would like to stress. The layman's process of interpretation is laborious, partial, uninspired. But it has its importance, for it is a conscious and logical process. In an a single flash of intuition, in a state of grace, as it were, during his trance. Comparing the shaman's divination with the explanation later offered by the community may then be the only means of approaching the question of the effectiveness of the cure. It becomes evident that nothing is less a matter of chance than a great shaman's seeing, that connecting a spirit with a misfortune is often highly meaningful for the patient himself. So meaningful that it enables him to accept the idea that a cure may be possible. Above all, the community process explains that which the shaman simply affirmed: the reason behind the relation between the misfortune and a spirit.

The following accounts form the basis of my analysis. I shall return later to their interpretation.

Portrait of a shaman

Ten years after his death, local opinion on Pirtung, one of the great Limbu shamans of the Mewa valley in the far eastern corner of Nepal, remains sharply divided. On one hand, everyone agrees that, since his death, in 1957, there has not been another like him. He was sent for every time someone got sick. He would arrive when they had given him up, carrying an old haversack under his arm. He would go into the house, take the patient's pulse, question the prostrate patient about his dreams, his diet, how he got along with the neighbors. Then he would go and sit on the terrace and ask for a dish of rice grains. One by one he would take his instruments out of the satchel. A black wooden dagger carved with snakes. Necklaces of seeds that he would put on over his head. A tiger bone into which he would blow - the sound that came out would delight the children squatting in front of him. A "bear tooth", a big shell, strange stones. He would sing a little three-note tune to call his spirits, to "raise them."[5] A woman would set a pot of beer in front of him. This would take him all night. People credited him with power, and force. It was he who would lead the great ritual against hail, for the benefit of the whole village. At that time there was no need to send to the ridge for a Tibetan lama, as they did after his death. And above all, he "saw", he controlled the dark forces and he healed. There are numerous witnesses. Years later, Sambrok's wife was still telling how, six months before the birth of her eldest son, he had seen in his journey to the lake above Tokpe that it would be a boy.[6]

Kapoba, also a shaman, affirmed that, thanks to Pirtung, he had recovered his speech when the gods had struck him dumb. Others said they had been cured of dizzy spells, of ailments that dry out the body and turn it black, of an illness that locks the legs, etc.

But, although he was recognized as an effective healer, ten years after his death, Pirtung was still not liked. A man of few words, hard to approach, authoritarian, it was clear that, even as they sent for him, people were afraid. "It's true," said his grandson Muktuba, also a shaman, "my

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[5] *Pokmā* in Limbu. This scene is a prelude to any ritual. It is the beginning of the summons to the helping spirits who later allow the shaman to make his diagnosis. These procedures correspond only partially to those of *jhākri* healers.

[6] In this ritual, the shaman brings the souls (*sāmlāmā*) out of the lake and returns them to the pregnant woman.

grandfather was feared. When he worshipped the spirits at home (*sewa* in Limbu), he would tell his beads like a Tibetan lama. And if someone came in, he would go on. No one would have interrupted him. Only when he was through would he speak. Why have you come, he would ask. 'What's wrong?' Every day, in some house or other, he would begin the ritual at five a.m. And sometimes at midnight he was still at it. Your doctors and their pills, they're done and gone in five minutes." They would also come for Pirtung when a household killed a pig. One of his neighbors from the same settlement as Ringo, who was a child at the time, remembers clearly. "When it came to building the altar, he was difficult. And when I was little, and he would come to my mother's, I would cry in terror. At home they said that Pirtung was a witch, that he had killed four people. I heard the same accusation several times. Here I shall tell the story of one of these bewitched deadmen. What is astonishing is that the various accounts agree. Pirtung was nearly dragged before a village court of justice.[7] And what a court it was! The judge was Mundunghe, one of the most restive Limbu household heads around. But in the end, Mundunghe was frightened...

The events took place around 1942-1948. At that time, Mundunghe, the Limbu leader, had just turned sixty. He held a half-dozen judgeships simultaneously, which allowed him to intervene nearly everywhere, including in the Bhotia territory at the far north end of the valley. A few years earlier, when he remarried, he turned over his large house in the hills to his first five wives and their offspring: children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, a whole tribe, not counting the servants and disgraced bodyguards - forty persons at the very least. His eldest son was twenty-seven, many others followed. All were avidly impatient to seize some of the power that their father persisted in exercising alone.

Thereafter, Mundunghe lived in a smaller, still quite beautiful house with his sixth wife, who was his favorite: she had borne him three sons, all still young. Some thirty persons surrounded them in their new dwelling. The bodyguards, the faithful of faithful, "fast men and strong". The council members, i.e. the Limbu household heads of his clan or others, from his

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[7] For information on the Limbu courts of justice (*amāl*) and the authority delegated to Limbu leaders by the Nepalese government, see Sagant 1978a; 1980b: 223ff. Mundunghe's life story, which I am in the process of writing, shows the last surviving practices of traditional political life (see Sagant 1981).

village or elsewhere, who were recognized by the Nepalese. Servants who, among other things, looked after the animals, a hundred head of cattle, fifteen buffalo cows, and - an unheard of luxury for the region - ten horses that were hardly ever ridden. Every year at harvest time, they would store away hundreds of quintals of rice grown on village land; half of the population worked for him, but also tenants in the four corners of three valleys. On the terrace of his house, every day or nearly, from early Mundunghe sat in judgement. For the most part, although times had changed, old Limbu political practices were still alive, albeit in the guise of a Nepalese institution. Mundunghe was at the summit of a pyramid of alliances, and the resulting network covered the mountains.

He had started from nothing and gone into politics forty years earlier. As a young man, he had bypassed the main household heads who, as he now did, controlled matters in the valley. He publicly forced them to accept him in their midst. He challenged the Tibetan leader of Walunchung for control over the immigrants crossing the snowy passes from Tibet to settle in Thudam and Tokpe Gola. At one time, he was able to defy anyone; to line up a hundred armed men for ritual combat; to send two hundred on a raid three days' walk from his base. He made child's play of disarming the first police station that the Nepalese set up in Taplejung for the purpose of neutralizing him and others like him. For a time he was looked on as a highway robber. A general was sent from Kathmandu by the King of Nepal with orders to bring back his head. Mundunghe slipped through his fingers disguised as a woman. He spent several hard years in Sikkim and Assam. His house "with fifty windows" was razed twice by Gurkha troops. He did several stints in Nepalese jails. But, for the Limbus, power was never something acquired once and for all. Young challengers were always joining the fray with all the energy of their youth. And old enemies were not about to lay down their arms. Over the last forty years, Mundunghe had found the most irrepressible opposition at his own door, in his own group, in his own village. The hostility was kept alive by Sektangba, his own brother, the enemy within, a close neighbor: his house was 300 feet away. Once again, almost under the nose of the whole village, he had created a coalition of malcontents from all sides: Limbu leaders, among whom certain were accredited by the Nepalese; major Sherpa herdsmen, Chetri moneylenders. They were openly supported by a few of the leaders who counted in the three valleys. They had the covert support of Nepalese civil servants in the tax offices and village courts. In 1942, they decided to play their hand, and nearly succeeded: they planned to poison

Mundunghe. At the time of the events presented here, the latter had just reversed the situation. The members of the coalition had gradually taken refuge in Sikkim and Assam. Sektangba had himself fled to a settlement at the entrance to the valley. For the first time in forty years the internal opposition, which eats away the hearts of the faithful and friends of the household, was without a leader. A short time after the poison affair, which worked out so neatly, events took another turn, although they began normally enough.

That year, in Mundunghe's big field that the women dry-farmed, the corn was not doing well. After a very poor harvest, the buffalo were let in to graze the stubble. A cow jumped off a terrace, landed badly and injured herself. She had to be destroyed. A servant came to plow. He gashed his foot badly with his knife. Even Mundunghe's wife was affected: one day she stayed out hoeing until sunset. She came back at nightfall, shivering, and was unable to get up for three days. The following year, the harvest was again a disaster. No one knew what was wrong with the field. The women urged Mundunghe to do something. He sent for Pirtung. He explained the bad harvests, the accidents. Pirtung sat down with his dish of rice grains to see what was going on. Finally, he said politely: "It's a bear tooth".[8]

On the ridges, in Shimbuk or Dalaincha, when someone kills a bear that has come to feast on the corn fields, the head and the skin go to the Limbu leader of the territory. To the hunter go the carcass and the most precious part, the "tooth", i.e. the penis. The meat is like tiger meat, it is not eaten. The spirit of the bear is a dangerous witch, one of the master spirits of the *yābā* shamans. But the penis has all sorts of properties. In 1971, it was worth a good price, sixty to eighty rupees a *tolā*, in the valley. In the plains, eight days' walk away, the price doubled, traders in Dharan were paying 160 rupees. Pirtung had in his sack a piece of bear penis. He had gotten it over the border, from the Bhotiyas. He used it primarily as a remedy for various kinds of fever, including malaria. He fashioned amulets with it to keep away witches, those of this world intent on doing harm, but

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[8] Bear: *mākuo* in Limbu. For general information on bears in the Himalayas, see Burrard 1939: 56-60, 161-64. On bears threatening the harvest in Limbuan, see Das 1902:2. On bear hunting: Gorer 1938:85-86; Dumbar 1938: 289. For their medicinal uses and other, see Bonerjea 1927:242. On the bear and virility, Elwin 1955:315. On the sale to China of bear penis as an aphrodisiac, see Gorer 1938: 86. On the practice of witches burying bear tooth, compare with Nebesky 1956:250-53.

also those of the Other World, the Wildcat, for instance. There were many other uses. In cases of difficult birth, for instance, there are several ways of proceeding. At the very top of the head of the woman in labor can be placed a pinch of dirt gathered at the time of an earthquake- the best dirt is bitten out of the ground at the full moon. If necessary, a train ticket brought back from a trip to Assam may have the same effect. But best by far is the bear tooth. The baby is soon ready to come. Moreover, bear penis has strong aphrodisiac properties. A fragment is ground to powder. It is mixed with water. This potion turns a sterile buffalo into a wild bull. Dogs become dangerous if they eat it. Men try to obtain it. And yet, beware the shaman who deals too openly. In the village one shaman was badly clubbed by eight angry women who could no longer take the advances of his client. But bear penis is mainly used to work evil. Bury a small piece in a field, do a short ritual and there is no corn that year, as in Mundunghe's field.

That is what Pirtung saw in his dish of rice: a bear tooth. He stood up, rounded the corner of the house and strode off into the night, with his assistants, towards the end of the field. On the highest terrace, he built an altar out of banana leaves and bamboo tubes. He sat down on the ground before the altar, and began to sing. He was calling the souls of the dead,[9] who resided at a distance, down the hill from the village, in the cemetery. The tombstones could be heard shifting on their bases. The souls were rising to the shaman's call. Pirtung guided them to the field, to where he was sitting. He forced them to dig up the bear tooth. And it is true that there was, after that, a spot in the field where the ground had recently been turned, as though women had been hoeing. Pirtung then accompanied the souls back to their graves in the cemetery. He gave them leave. He closed the way behind him in the night. And he returned to the house. Next year the harvest was good. There were no more accidents.

That night Mundunghe thanked Pirtung. He left him, as was customary, the rice he had used for divining as well as the various other ingredients. But he did not pay him "the price of his trouble" *(nari kujen)*. Not that he was displeased with Pirtung's services. It was just that he never paid shamans, no more than he did blacksmiths or tailors. He deemed that the prosperity of those around him depended on his own vitality, he Mundunghe. That the fear he inspired throughout the valley ensured the

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[9] These souls are called *let sām* in Limbu. Normally, they dwell in the stones (*su-luṅg*) raised over graves. See Chemjong 1961:263,304,383.

village peace. And that, if he thought about it, it was the villagers who were in his debt. Pirtung poured the rice into his sack and left. Whatever the truth may be, someone wished Mundunghe ill.

Later there was a new and more serious attack, in the form of an abcess, a large boil or phlegmon on Mundunghe's neck. Delirious and shaking with fever, he remained prostrate, curled up under a cover in one corner of the house. Rapidly all the shamans and healers who had any reputation for effectiveness were summoned from far and wide: *yābās, phedāṅgmās, jhākris*, *sāmbās*, all dropped everything and came from their villages, sometimes traveling a great distance. For the whole time of Mundunghe's illness they took turns at his bedside, performing one ritual after another. Several days running and several times a day, the bodyguards also went down to the settlement near Tumbangphe in search of Pirtung. But he was not there. He was never there. One day his wife would say he was in the village of Lingtep, the next, in Chinabung, the next, in Thunglung. Was he turning a deaf ear? Mundunghe's state was critical. The other shamans worked in vain, there was no improvement, on the contrary. It was only some days later that Pirtung finally appeared. In the courtyard of the house, a crowd had formed; Mundunghe was lying on the terrace. At his side, a *yābā* in a feather headdress was officiating, a bunch of banana leaves in one hand. All around them were bodyguards, neighbors, political cronies, relatives, shamans and healers from the four corners of the valley, all sitting shoulder to shoulder, drinking pots of beer, calling to the women for tobacco, noisy and healthy. It may well be that Pirtung received a cool welcome. Later I was present at a similar scene, where the *subba* gave vent to his anger at having been kept waiting by a shaman who had to be coaxed. Pirtung acted quickly. When he had performed the divination to see the source of the problem, he demanded a piece of meat from a cow buffalo, went down to the field below the house, built an altar to Sābā Sām, the monkey spirit, offered the meat, came back to the courtyard, picked up his gear and left the house. The abcess burst that night. Mundunghe was saved.

For Mundunghe, who was still recuperating and sore, the time for interpretation was approaching. All the shamans and healers around had tried to figure out who, among the gods or men, could wish their client so much harm, with such precision, such spite. Unable to work a cure, they had formulated one hypothesis after another, until they had invoked in their rituals most of the spirits of creation. And yet, with this type of illness, a

boil, a phlegmon, one usually does not have to look far. There are, above all, two explanations that must first be considered. Either the trouble is due to Yumā, the Grandmother, a household goddess who is ordinarily well disposed, but who becomes ferocious when she is angered. But Yumā does not usually attack so suddenly. She gives warning. There are dreams, or the copper pots on the shelves rattle about at night. Or the threads tangle on the loom, they keep breaking and the women are unable to weave. The other explanation is man's malevolence, the curse (Māngde) of one of your dependants whom you have intentionally, or unintentionally, trampled, the jealousy (Nāhen) of an enemy, or even an affine. If someone wishes you ill, he has a thousand ways of bringing it about. He can go to an isolated field and set up a small bamboo trap. He says your name over and over to draw your soul. He captures it in the trap.[10] He then stamps his foot three times to convene the spirits, those from above and those form below. He offers a chicken to one of them. A red one for Toksoṅgbā, the spirit of the ridge. Black for Kocckmā. The Bitch, who haunts the valley floors. White for Tāmpuṅgmā, master of the forests. He then profers his death wish. He belches forth his curse. He delivers your soul to the devil for the blood of the chicken. Afterwards everything is gone. The trap is destroyed, no sign of the ritual, you do not know who has acted. But the attack is lightning fast. Ordinarily Mundunghe was not worried about spirits. He would say: "Spirits? I can't see them. Show me one and I'll believe." Of course, this should not be taken in the way a Westerner would understand it. If Mundunghe did not believe in spirits, it was because he was convinced - and his political power was the most obvious proof of this - that the local gods were on his side, inside him: these who make you violent, who make you walk with your head held high, who make the body light, the house invulnerable to attacks from the forest. "At that time, Ringo relates, I" was eight or ten. I was always at my grandfather's. He was a little man, thin and very red. He drank a lot. When he settled people's quarrels, sitting cross-legged on the terrace, he couldn't keep still. He would stick out his tongue, roll his eyes furiously and thrash around. 'How's that, you dog, you don't want this affair settled? Seize this dog,' he

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[10] Trap: *i* in Limbu, *pāso* in Nepalese; to catch in a trap: *i yukmā* (L) (C.J. 1961: 19 , 20). There are many other means, such as shooting an arrow, which can be combined with yet others. And yet, when speaking of Pirtung, informants always came back to this one technique. Any shaman other than the witch himself can retrieve a stolen soul. Bvt if it is stained with a drop of blood, it means the patient will die. In such cases, great sums of money are spent in the hope that the shaman will succeed: up to Rs.300 in 1971, twice the monthly salary of a school teacher.

would shout to the bodyguards, 'tie him up, put him in stocks. You'll see, you dog, we'll come to an understanding.' He would have people shackled. He would have them beaten with nettles until the confessed. He imposed heavy fines on his opponents, whoever resisted was beaten up. He had enemies alright. He had enemies. For the first time, when he had this phlegmon, he was scared, really scared."

As for Yuma, the Grandmother, Mundunghe did not think he had displeased her, he went to too much trouble to keep on her good side. He was convinced it was human malevolence. But who had acted? He went over the most recent cases and malcontents. He did not discount old curses, prefered by people who were now dead, but whose effects could be felt over several generations. He also considered those close to him, his allies who had shown kindness to Sektangba or one of his various enemies on the run. The business of the poison came back to him, and he again saw all those faces, and there was the coalition, all too easily dispersed. Half dead ghosts came out of their closets, full of tenacious hatred. Mundunghe consulted the shaman of Songbang, his own settlement. He had been one of those who, at the time of the boil, had thought of a curse. "I knew it," he told him. "Someone cursed you and put a hex on you." It was rapidly decided to perform the great ritual to Mangde in order to put a stop to any further misfortune.

Mundunghe sent his men through the village to invite all the household heads who were his dependents, all his clan brothers, the younger men who came under his authority. The elders were also called upon. They were needed because they were the only ones who remembered the old curses. For the ritual to be effective, the name of the person who laid on the curse must be pronounced. On the prescribed day, the group met on the edge of a precipice. From every house, the villagers flocked with their families. They were carrying liquor, gifts, and above all a handful of rice that they put in a basket as they arrived. The shaman carefully stirred in the grains from each household.[11] Then an enormous goat was led in for the

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[11]This is the equivalent of the Nepalese *sarāp bagāunu* ritual. See also the Tibetan *nang-dme* ritual (Stein 1962: 71). A curse, which is not only associated with witchcraft, causes pollution (Caplan 1970:66). The life force withers: *thumbā lākpā* (Chemjong 1961:132,247). The ideas on shame and honor recur here (Sagant 1981). A cure can apply to an individual. It then comes under the heading of the traditional practices of extraction and sucking (*phiṅgwā*), which are used, for example, in healing a wound from a witch's arrow, or a patient in the grip of an uncontrolled possession causd by

sacrifice. A pole was planted at the edge of the cliff. The group assembled facing the altar. In their midst there was an old man holding taut a cotton string, the other end of which was tied to Mangde's pole. The shaman began by chanting the story of the first curse that fell on the world. The elders passed out the consecrated grains. When the shaman had finished, they recalled aloud all the curses they knew of. Each time, the assembly, including young children, would repeat in unison and throw rice on the altar to "beat" Mangde, to "drive him away". With his knife, the shaman guided Mangde along the thread, from the assembly to the pole, to the altar, to the goat. Mundunghe was there, too. He recalled land disputes, trees cut down on territorial borderlines, hunting rights not respected, pressure on opponents who were humiliated and beaten, all those he suspected, including some present, of wishing him harm. And, each time he threw some rice, he murmured the name of someone. When the goat had thus been taxed with all the curses, avowed or not, they cut off its head. Blood was sprinkled on the altar stone. The cotton thread was cut, the altar leveled. With his back to the precipice, the shaman kicked out behind him and sent the pole over the cliff. A line was drawn on the ground. Mangde was gone and confidence returned among all present. Then a long time was spent in all sorts of rituals, ending with a ceremony in Mundunghe's house for the local gods. "That was the day," Ringo told me, "that my grandfather became convinced that Pirtung, the shaman of Tumbangphe, was the one who had cursed him, Mundunghe."

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by the bear on the tiger. Here we come back to the Nepalese techniques of *jhār phuk* (see Chemjong 1961:206 A cause can be laid on a social group as well: the family as defined by the house and Nahangma's ritual, etc; the lineage that performs the *torigsirig* ritual; the political group headed by a *subbā*, which meets at Dasai according to Nepalese custom. This was Pirtung's case, his relationship with Mundunghe was one of services rendered, even though he was not a member of his clan. Generally speaking, curses arise in the context of hierarchical relations, whether or not kinsmen are involved. In the event of a curse, no ritual to the local gods can take place until the internal quarrels and latent hostilities in the group have been cleared up. Here again we find the Tibetan idea (Stein 1962: 71) that the "sometimes violent struggles within a family" lead to "internal pollution". In the case of the Limbus, however, it is primarily relatives by marriage who are concerned. Similarly, here, as among Tibetans, the curse may be accompanied by supernatural sanctions such as hail or lighting (Bell 1928: 43). In Nepal these same elements appear among the Tamangs (Hofer 1981: 10, 18-19,139) the Lepchas (Gorer 1938:440), the southern Limbus (Caplan 1970: 66,160,218). In Kathamandu, civil servants cannot accept the *tikā* from their superiors at the Dasai festival if they harbor any hostile fellings towards them (Anderson 1971:153). I shall return elsewhere to Māndge's ritual, as it was used by Limbu leaders in manipulating allies whose loyalty was shakye.

For some time during my fieldwork I was unable to accept this account. It was incomprehensible that Mundunghe come up with such poor reasons - an unpaid price of his trouble, at the most some ten rupees - for Pirtung being his attacker. Why did his anxieties not make him look to Sektangba and his political enemies. He had taken everything from them: rice fields, cattle, homes, even their birthplace. They, and many like them who had undergone similar fates in the political struggle, had a thousand reasons for hating, for laying on curses. "But," Ringo told us, "you don't understand. Mundunghe was sure Pirtung had saved his life. During his convalescence, he had recalled several times that, even before the abcess burst in the night, he had felt better as soon as the shaman of Tumbangphe got there. But, at the same time, he had come to wonder if Pirtung, with his altar to the monkey spirit, had not simply undone the evil he had done. It is because Pirtung cured him that Mundunghe became convinced that the shaman of Tumbangphe had first of all cursed him. Only the witch himself can undo what he had done. His soul had been handed over, not to the Bitch, nor to the master of the ridges, nor to the spirit of the forests, but to Sābā Sām, the monkey spirit. Likewise, it was not to Sektangba or to his political enemies that he should impute the origin of his illness, but to Pirtung, who had not received the "price of his trouble" the evening he had dug up the bear tooth. Mundunghe's confidence returned with his strength. He was cured, but mad. He was determined not to let the shaman get away with anything else, to make him pay dearly for his attack, to humiliate him and tame him. This was hardly wise, but he had always been sure of himself. He would bide his time.

The occasion arose in 1944. Pirtung's success did not stop at the spirit world. Women in the village, and further abroad, were drawn to his taciturn style. That year, he had an affair with a girl from Phale. She was around twenty and related to him on her mother's side, although somewhat distantly. Custom considered it an incestuous relationship, but by the "hem of the dress". This type of incest did not draw hail or lightning, or any real anger on the part of the gods. In any other circumstance, it would not have been enough of a threat to community life for leaders to be seriously worried. But Mundunghe got a hold of it. He concocted a plan with Tampunghe, the leader of Tumbangphe, one of "his men" since his sixth marriage. And, one morning, Pirtung found himself on Mundunghe's terrace, tightly guarded. Facing him was the full council of leaders and, on his left, the woman he loved. Everything was public knowledge in the village, but it was whispered. Once the leaders intervened, however,

everything came out in broad daylight. The young woman was questioned at length by Yangphang, one of Mundunghe's men. As is the case in these circumstances, the most ruthless questions were put with an air of formality. Terrified, she replied with simplicity. There was stiffled laughter in the audience. Pirtung remained silent. The questioning over, the young woman was dismissed. She stood up, pulled her shawl over her hair and left, mortified, without a glance for Pirtung, who was left alone. The leaders held a conference. Mundunghe pronounced his sentence. The shaman was to pay a fine of one hundred rupees. He had no money. He was made to sign an IOU, on the spot, backed by a mortgage on one of his fields, the biggest one, which, year in year out produced on the order of twelve *muri* of rice, twelve of corn and five of millet. In other words, Mundunghe now had the enjoyment of this land. He was good enough to let Pirtung go on working it, something he did not have to do. Pirtung was now a tenant, working his own field and, consequently, was required to turn over half of each year's harvest to his judge until he could come up with a hundred rupees to redeem his debt. This story, which I came across while looking at some land holdings, was the starting point of the present article. Later, the land was signed over to Yangphang, the bodyguard who had so ably led the questioning that day.

From that day on, war was declared, and everyone held his breath. It is possible that, at the time, the entire village was obsessed with witchcraft. For example, in 1945, a year after Pirtung's trial, a man called Tinsukhie, Yangphang's brother and Mundunghe's political ally, had a small judgeship in a settlement by the river, and had to intervene in a dispute between father and son over an inheritance. The father was a shaman. On the basic issue, Tinsukhie ruled in favor of the son. He fell ill immediately thereafter. There were no sequels, however, and he regained his health. But Tinsukhie went around saying that the shaman had put a spell on him.

Four years passed and nothing happened. Moreover, it was not Pirtung who dug up the hatchet. The dispute broke out in a tragicomic way, the year was 1948. Everything happened very fast, which gives some idea of the shaman's power. Like everyone around, Pirtung kept black pigs in a drystone-walled pen next to his house. At that time, he had a large three-year-old sow that he planned on sacrificing to Yuma. During the mating season, the sow wandered loose among the houses, as was customary in the village. In order to curb her wanderings, Pirtung had tied a triangle of wood over the animal's withers. In spite of this, the sow, which was

enormous, broke down a fence and ravaged a field of corn. Unfortunately, the field belonged to Yangphang, Mundunghe's bodyguard; he was furious and went up to see his boss. "My corn is ruined," he said. "It's Pirtung's sow! What should I do?" Mundunghe sucked on his water pipe. He hesitated, then said: "Kill the animal." With two men, Yangphang went back town to Tumbangphe. At the house, he grabbed a spear, told one of the men to take the beam of the plow, and all three set out through the settlement after the pig. They finally backed it against the wall of a house. One man caught a foot and threw the animal. Another got the plow beam over her withers and pinned her down. Yangphang sunk his spear into the sow's side, trying for the heart. He missed, and the sow fought free, knocked over one of the men and fled, squealing and dripping blood. She made for her master's, all three men on her tail. Pirtung was on his terrace. "What are you doing to my sow?" he yelled. Yangphang pulled up, spear in hand: "Your sow ate my corn", he yelled back. "She's got to be destroyed." And, this time, killed it.

Yangphang went back up to Songbang. He spent the day at Mundunghe's and seemed his normal self. That evening he went back home. "That was when he began to have sharp pains. Soon he was rolling around on the floor. He was coughing up blood. He was in terror. 'It's Pirtung,' he cried. 'I killed his pig this morning. He's bewitched me. Go get Pirtung, he's the only one who can save me!' They rushed off to the shaman's. He had gone. He had not even stayed for the death of his sow. He had rushed into his house. He had taken an egg. He had grabbed a black hen from the chicken pen. He had run behind the house and down the path that leads to the river. In the field where the Bhotiya hut now stands, he built one altar to Toksongba, the spirit of the mountain ridge, and another to Shenga, the master of the valley floors. Using the egg, he called them. As for Yangphang's soul, he caught it by calling his name. He killed the black hen, he gave the soul over to the spirits. Then, without going home, he went directly up to the village of Yokma. No one found him. Yangphang died the following evening."

I did not understand this story at all. I asked Ringo, "But who saw Pirtung take a black chicken and go off to the river? Who saw him sacrifice the chicken in the field? Did Yangphang see him?"--"No," replied Ringo, "Yangphang didn't see him. But Tauke did, and so did other people from Tumbangphe. He was alone, standing near some rocks. He was doing a

ritual. There were no clothes beside him.[12] People were intrigued. Later, they understood. "-- "But," I said "did they go to up and tell Yangphang then?" --"No, of course not." replied Ringo, "they didn't say anything. As soon as Yangphang felt sick, he saw it himself. He asked for Pirtung. The witch is the only one who can undo what he has done. That's why Pirtung left for Yokma. So they couldn't find him."

Tinsukhie was Yangphang's brother. After his brother's death he inherited his belongings. Among his things, there was the mortage that Pirtung had signed in front of Mundunghe's court four years earlier. Usually Tinsukhie called on Pirtung to perform the annual household ritual. That year he did not change his practice. At the beginning of the rising season, a few months after the death of his brother, he asked Pirtung to come for Nāhāṅgmā's propitiation ceremony. After the sacrifice, he took the mortage out of his chest. "This is the price of your trouble," he said. And he tore up the IOU in front of Pirtung. One hundred rupees. No shaman had ever received such an homage. Four years. Never in the history of the village had a debt disappeared so quickly. "Tinsukhie was afraid, " explained Ringo.

Kapoba was a young man at that time. He was just finishing, under the supervision of his master, his apprenticeship as a shaman. He was said to be very promising. And it is true that, subsequently, he partially filled the vacancy left by Pirtung's death. On the day he was ordained, however, things went badly. During Yuma's great ritual, Kapoba fell into a state of catalepsy, and his master had great difficulty in bringing him round. He finally came to his senses. But it became evident that he was now unable to utter a world. He was dumb. His affliction was attributed to Pirtung, who was perhaps jealous to see a rival power emerge in the village. Kapoba was bundled off, with a leg of mutton, to see the old shaman of Tumbangphe. When he returned, he was talking non-stop.

Later, Pipunem, from the village of Yokma, on the ridge, came upon a goat in his garden, feasting on his tomatoes. With one blow of his knife he struck it down. Unfortunately for him it was another of Pirtung's animals that Muktuba, his grandson was scouring the village for, in tears. Pipunem lost the use of his arm. It remained flexed, he was totally unable to

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[12] The shaman often uses these pieces of clothing (*yābo*) when he brings back the soul that has left the patient. Their absence indicates that the shaman in not acting in the name of a houshold.

straighten it. The shaman of Yokma worked on it with no luck. He finally sent his client off to Pirtung with a *pońg* of liquor, a large turned wooden bottle holding several liters. Pirtung took the *pońg*, performed a ritual, and Pipunem was able to unbend his arm.

For a long time I thought the stories that had terrified Ringo as a child were only family tales. And that, next door, the interpretation was different. Of course, in the case of Yangphang's death, the stories jibed. Mundunghe was sure he had been bewitched, like Yangphang. Tongoli, Yangphang's widow, had lodged a formal complaint with the Limbu leader's court. She accused Pirtung of killing her husband. Out of terror, Tinsukhie destroyed a mortgage of a hundred rupees to stay in favor with the shaman. Taukie had seen for himself the witch at work in a field. Kapoba recovered his speech and Pipunem could straighten his arm. Even Muktuba, the shaman's grandson, did not really deny anything, he was evasive: "My grandfather was feared, but he was also respected..." The reports agreed, but what did the others, the silent majority, think.

I was working on land holdings along the river. My informant, Siguenem, was explaining that one of the fields of the settlement had been sold a long time ago to some Bhotiyas from the highlands. That was strange. Out of the more than five hundred lots of the territory, that was the only one. And these were not just any Bhotiyas! They were from the other side of the river, from the distant village of kiling, more than a day's walk away. In December they would come down with their animals. "They were there now", said Siguenem. "They lived in a hut. You've seen them, haven't you? A few would come down at different times of the year, for the plowing, hoeing, harvest. A Chetri newcomer to the village looked after the water when it was time to irrigate. This is a field," said Siguenem, "that no Limbu is willing to plant. Every time someone works it, a man in the village dies. It is called the field of the curse. A black chicken was killed there once." That field by the river, with its hut and the big surface rocks, was where Taukie had come upon Pirtung working his spell thirty years ago. I had to bow to the evidence. The struggle for land in the village was intense. And yet no one wanted to work the rice field. In everyone's mind, Yangphang died of witchcraft. The entire community agreed on this.

Interpretations

In the light of the facts provided by the above account, let us return to the propositions set out in the introduction. I shall deal with the following points in order: the emerging consensus; the layman's analysis; the gift of clairvoyance in one shaman; what the community is looking for when it interprets a divination; the relation between this analysis and the effectiveness of the cure; the link between the shaman's power and the villagers' concensus; the shaman and social memory; "nested worlds". With these elements in mind, I shall conclude by clarifying a point of method concerning the study of the effectiveness of shamanic cures.

The emerging consensus

In the case of Mundunghe's phlegmon, when shaman after shaman came to his bedside, we find the multiplicity of contradictory interpretations which the Thami jhākri attribute to a particular display of spirit power. There are nearly as many hypotheses as there are healers. And above all, as Miller points out, there is no recognized authority proceeding from any body of clergy, or from any hierarchy, which proclaims one truth more valid than another. Every shaman offers his own interpretation of the supernatural origins of the ailment. Rituals proliferate. The community is in a state of diffuse expectation.

But this state does not last. After a sometimes short, sometimes long, time the laymen, led by the sick man, finally decide that the diagnosis of one shaman, to the exclusion of all others, shows clairvoyance. This idea of a - wide or sometimes only partial - consensus in the lay community struck me by chance during one of my stays. On my first trip, a young woman in a neighboring house had died in pregnancy after two months of suffering. During this time, numerous shamans had seen her: they came from the village, but also from the valley, each with a reputation for something, including a Tibetan lama and Indo-Nepalese healers. All sorts of diangoses were proposed, all sorts of rituals performed. As is the custom in these cases, everyone spent their days at the house: relatives, neighbors, friends. They watched the rituals, put in their two bits, but did not take a stand. The shamans remained silent or disagreed with each other. The villagers, of course, could not make anything out. Everything seemed confusing and obscure. The young woman continued to go downhill. There was that particular tension among those present, so eloquent, always the same in

such cases: what was causing the illness? As though this were the only question that could be asked, the only one that could save. The young woman died. And no one at the time could have said, without risk of contradiction, what she died of, what spirit had killed. All sorts of conflicting suggestions were made.

When I returned two years later, the dead woman came up in the course of conversation, and I was surprised to hear someone say that her case was simple. That she had died from a particular disease, because of a particular spirit. With time, a consensus had emerged from the community.

The process of interpretation that appears in Mundunghe's healing is not unusual. I am not, of course, saying that the lay community's analysis is in every case carried through to a conclusion. Quite often the "family shaman" is called for minor ailments: most of the time he treats headaches, stomachaches and toothaches. He divines on his first visit. He comes back two or three times to appease the spirit causing the illness. The patient gets well. And that is that. No one tries to find out why the spirit made the attack. Sometimes it happens that the analysis is undertaken three months later if the household experiences more trouble. In one way, the shamans' cure is something permanent. The anthropologist, too, often restricts his study of effectiveness to a ritual or an illness. But the shamans's act must be looked at over a period of time. It is then that, one day or another, the interpretation becomes apparent. In the process, events long past are reexamined, as in Mundunghe's treatment. In the same manner, the consensus does not always extend to the whole community. Sometimes it may be restricted to a single household, a minority of households. Whatever questions may remain, I would like to emphasize one point: the interpretation that the lay community gives of the shaman's divination is one of the essential elements of shamanic healing.

The analysis of the lay community and its purpose

The actual process of interpretation is captured in the account of Mundunghe's abcess. Doubtless, his grandson was simplifying a great deal when he reconstituted, thirty years after the fact, his grandfather's words, much in the same way a family keeps only the outline of a memory. Nevertheless, succinct though it is, the example is interesting. It throws a fleeting light on the purpose of the analysis and the approach used to arrive at it.

If we follow our informant's thinking, we see that Mundunghe proceeds by deduction. Each stage is marked by the exclusion of one or several hypotheses. Everything is very logical, too logical, it seems. It is likely that reality is more intuitive. And that the line of reasoning suggested by our informant is a linear reconstruction, after the fact, much like a historian might proceed. A number of stages appear, and we do not see how they fit in chronologically.

At the time of the phlegmon, there are a number of shamans divining; not one carries the day.

The abcess bursts. Instantly Mundunghe judges that his recovery is due to Pirtung. He chooses as valid the divination of the shaman who imputed his misfortune to the monkey spirit. Here begins the analysis: why the monkey?

During his convalescence, Mundunghe starts looking for an explanation. Our informant does not have much to say about these first steps, nor about the Limbu leader's entourage. The diagnoses of the various shamans are probably brought up as Mundunghe falls back on "common sense" solutions: the anger of Yumā, the Grandmother, or men's wickedness.

The idea of Yumā is rejected. In so doing, the investigation has taken its first step. There are a thousand ways of displeasing Yumā. But Yumā is a household goddess. So even if she sent the monkey spirit in retaliation, the reason for her anger must be sought first among the members of the household. By eliminating Yumā, Mundunghe shows that he is sure of those around him, some thirty persons in all. No one in his house wishes him harm. If this were the case, Yumā would be irate.

The wickedness of men must be the answer then. There are now two possibilities, according to Limbu thinking: an act undertaken out of jealousy (Nāhen) or a curse (Māngde). Mundunghe rejects the idea of jealousy. By doing this, he points his investigation in a new direction. Anyone can harbor jealousy. Someone close as well as a stranger. But curses follow strict rules, fit into a complex framework. A curse is always laid on by one of your "own men", as the Nepalese say. By eliminating Nāhen, Mundunghe accepts the idea that he must look among those close to him,

his dependents: those who gather at his house for the Dasãĩ festival, or his political allies or relatives by marriage.[13]

But there are two kinds of curses. An aged mother abandoned by her son or the tenant pressured by his landlord proclaim their curse aloud, before witnesses, stating their reasons. These are public curses. They are manifestations of an open conflict. The other way of proceeding is to lay on a curse in secret, silently. The day of the great ritual to Mangde, Mundunghe does not think that his illness is due to a public curse. This is one more step. He must look among those close to him, excepting of course the members of his household. He must find a lurking conflict, a latent rancor.

Last of all, this silent curse may or may not be accompanied by witchcraft. All manner of procedures are known: shooting an arrow, burying a bear tooth, selling someone's soul. Mundunghe could also think of numerous potential witches. Everyone who had a good reason to wish him dead. During Mãṅgde's ritual, the moment when Mundunghe examines the possible identity of his assailant is of capital importance. And when, at long last, he identifies Pirtung, the analysis has come to an end. Hę has discovered the reason for the monkey's attack: he did not pay the shaman for digging up the bear tooth.

Thus, in the healing process, the laymen's work of interpretation consists in seizing upon the shamans' divinations and answering two questions: was it really this spirit rather than another, and why did it attack? The great shaman puts them on the track. The patient and those close to him slowly and in all lucidity, reasoning logically, retrace the path the shaman completed in a single step during his trance.

Illness and a man's past

The shaman asks a question pertaining to the realm of the gods, the only area in which he can intervene, and the layman always seeks the answer in his own world, the world of men, by searching the past. The end of the

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[13] In Limbu mythology, the first curse occurred at a time when men and the spirits had not yet gone their separate ways. The quarrel was between half-brothers, one human, the others belonging to the spirit realm. It led to the separation between men and spirits. Although men are happy with this separation, the gods are always trying to cross over, to come back to the world of men.

layman's analysis is simple, concrete. But the process of getting there is especially complex. The entire past of a person, of a household, a group, is thrown into question, sometimes over a long period of time. Limbus always establish a link between a man's illness and his past.

That is how Mundunghe proceeded: he examined his past before hitting on Pirtung as the one responsible for his misfortune. His successive marriages and the anger of the brothers of his abandoned wives. The growing ambitions of his sons, hungry for a share of his power. The ill feelings of his former bodyguards who, for reasons unknown, did not follow him to his new residence. The possible jealousy on the part of members of his council who, at some time, bowed to him at the end of a conflict they did not win. The hatred of Sektangba, his brother, whom he had cheated of his birthright. The motivations of those who had taken part in the poisoning business. Secret alliances that enemies from the valley might have contracted with those close to him. Possibly, support that Sherpa dependents might have lent the Tibetan leader from Walungchung, his old adversary. Manipulation of his entourage by Nepalese officials who might want to get rid of him. Not counting unhappy tenants, victims of his court, dependents weighted down with obligations.

During his convalescence, Mundunghe took stock of all of this. And when, on the day of the great ritual to Mangde, he finally imputed his misfortune to Pirtung, he swept aside all other hypotheses. Conjecture about betrayal by friends was over; the search for lurking conflicts, at an end; political enemies and their old hatreds, forgotten. In putting a name to the witch, Mundunghe sent the flock of other phantoms back to whence the came. Because an interpretation had been found, old conflicts would no longer weigh upon the future.

In the cure process, the end of the analysis is perhaps less important than the way it is arrived at. Not paying the shaman was not the worst offense Mundunghe had committed against the rules of the community. It is simply that, at that time, of all his enemies, the shaman was the one who frightened him the most. By recognizing this, Mundunghe pruged himself of guilt for all his other transgressions as well. The future was clear once more.

There is a connection between illness and a man's attitude toward his own past. There is a relation between a confused mind, inability to act,

Mundunghe's fear and the abcess that just happened to appear at that moment. The inverse is also true, a relation exists between peace in the heart and good health. The ritual helped the Limbu leader go from confusion to confidence.

The Limbus have formulated these notions into a theory. All "cultural ailments", such as "locked legs", "swelling or dessication of the body", "losing the way", having one's "soul stolen", "the arrow", "throwing stones", etc., make the patient and his house impure. Illness thereby becomes part of a complex structure of representations of shame and honor. Shame results from pollution. It goes along with illness. Shame is, in the first place, a state of body and mind, that with which Mundunghe was struggling during his illness. It is also a social situation, it can mean that the patient is cut off from the community, isolated, banished. Finally, it is a religious fact: the paths from the Other World to the local gods are cut. This three-step analysis is the view taken by a Western anthropologist. It is not the Limbus'. For them, everything is connected. If Mundunghe's social relations have gone sour, this brings shame on him. This is invinting illness. With the help of his friends and relatives, Mundunghe must examine his past, he must find the poison. The shaman's ritual will then restore his honor and vitality. He will recover.

This is an embryonic definition of the way illness and healing work according to Limbu concepts. Illness is born of a breakdown in social relations. The shaman does not treat the organ or the body out of context. He treats the body in its environment. But, before the anthropologist completes his survey of "representations" and gives way to the psychoanalyst, who will use his own paradigms to explain the effectiveness of the cure, I think we should look at how the Limbus themselves think of these things. Their views of the body, the life force, the flower-soul, "locked legs", spirit attacks, have no "scientific reality" for us. And yet sometimes manipulating these symbols brings about a cure. This effectiveness raises many questions of general interest.

Whatever the case may be, there is a relation between illness and a badly integrated past, which the Limbus have conceptualized within the framework of their ideas on shame and honor.[14]

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[14] See Sagant 1981; Hardman 1981.

The shaman and social memory

This vocation of the shaman for stirring up his community's history seems to me important. The process of healing continually leads to rethinking the past, and, even more, to developing a collective social memory.

The old Limbu society, in which political power was not delegated to any one person, accepted that household heads confront each other in a climate of upheaval and violence in order to exhaust and resolve their conflicts. But, however violent the quarrels may have been, custom required that, once peace was restored, the two adversaries first lay down their arms and, above all, become allies, friends. Social relations were born of conflicts which were carried through. Every peace treaty resulted in a new alliance. These alliances respected a hierarchical order. *Rapports de force* were a recognized fact. Former enemies would gather around the carcass of an animal: sharing it out, the way this was done, meant that one of the men acknowledged the primacy of the other. This was a society which wanted transparency. But, even when quarrels are resolved according to the rules of social institutions, there are scars. Rancor, humiliation, wounds that have healed too fast, old sores that have healed badly and are just waiting for an opportunity to reopen. The institutions had not provided for such situations. Or rather, they acknowledged hate, jealousy, curses. But with these, we enter the shadowy world of the shaman. It is up to him, if he is able, to cleanse the festering wounds.

By encouraging people to reconcile themselves with their past, the shaman, in his own way, takes up where political institutions leave off. He has the same goals: consolidate alliances, remove obstacles to the creation of the network of social relations; and in order to accomplish this, bring old adversaries to come to terms, deep in their hearts, with conflictual relations and to accept them.

Like the historian, the shaman advocates constructing the past as a basis for the future. "But," says the painter Georges Braque in his aphorisms, "those who base their predictions on the past forget that the past itself is no more than a hyothesis." The shaman does not forget this. His divinations are a means of proposing the past as a hypothesis. He encourages the patient, his entourage, the community to investigate the possible meaning of

their shared history. He is completely indifferent, however, to any conclusions the lay community might draw. And thes to such an extent that his divination is sometimes used against him, as in the case of Mundunghe's illness.

Every healing has a collective dimension. When the analysis of the lay community is carried to its conclusion, it contributes to the social memory that makes the future possible.

Nested worlds

Three factors enter onto Mundunghe's recovery, then. The illness, which refers to the human body. The spirit attack, which emanates from the world of the gods. The explanation of the attack that the community discovers in the rubble of its past. The body, society, the gods: the notion that these three levels are interrelated is found throughout Asia amd America. The process of healing, and that process alone, allow the shaman to impose on everyone the reality of these three embedded worlds; to make it evident that an action in one sphere has effects in another.

In the normal course of events, the shaman's action is preventative: he is called in at the begining in the "rising season", for example. He goes from house to house, summoning the spirits of the forest, offering them an egg, the blood of a chickenn. He propitiates the local gods so they will go on ensuring bodily vigor, the family's prosperity. Inside the house, everything is in order: the division of household space tht provides a place for each according to rank, sex and age.[15] The rules of society are respected. The head of the house lives with honor. The normal state of the world is one of purity, separation, civilization. Barbarism is relegated to the exterior, the forest.

The religous calender ensures that, at appointed times, the shaman may cause the gods to be present in the house. At the end of the ritual, he gives them leave. He accompanies them back to the Other World, the forest, the mountain, the hereafter. On his way back, he draws a line that he asks them not to cross. But the gods are invisible forces[16] as Miller says. A force is

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[15] Sagant 1973a.

[16] Miller 1979:45: "These powers can be.... called spirits in English, but I think 'invisible powers' corresponds more closely to the sense of the Nepalese term *deuta*."

always an abstract concept. Its presence can be grasped only indirectly, by its manifestation. When, having performed his preventive rites, the shaman leaves the house, the world is in harmony. The religious calender is above all positive in a reverse way, i.e. for the several days of the year when the gods are present, as A.W. Macdonald points out for the Newars.[17] The rest of the time, if the harmonious state persists, they have no reason to show themselves. They remain abstractions. The three worlds are disengaged, so to speak. Each in its own corner: the gods on one side, men on the other.

The existence of the gods can be known only through the interventions that betray their presence: Mundunghe's abcess; the bad corn harvest; his wounded buffalo cow; his day-laborer's accident, his wife's brief illness; Pipunem's paralyzed arm; the fact that Kapoba suddenly fell dumb; Yangphang's death. When the gods reveal themselves, they provoke a crisis in the world of men. In the presence of the impurity that goes with illness, the local gods withdraw. The protective shell ensured by their presence vanishes. The world of the forest overwhelms the house, sweeping away the spatial order within. Confusion and animality reign. Barbarism enters, and everything riverts to a state of nature. The only protection against marauding death, the roaring tiger, shame, is to remain still. In fear and trembling, the household turns to its shaman.

In the main, he acts to restore a state of civilization. He expels the powers of the forest. He restores order to the household space. He reestablishes conact with the local gods. While the ritual is being performed, the center post of the house is the axis of the world; his patient's eyes, the sun and the moon; the god of the mountain once again takes up his place at the top of the patient's head. Above all, he identifies the attack of the monkey spirit as the cause of the disorder. The household searches its past. They discover that the rule has been broken, the shaman was not paid. They become aware that, when they intervene on their own level, that of society, this affects the other two: the monkey frees the soul, the patient gets well. From all evidence, the shaman is right, the three worlds are interdependent.

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[17] Macdonald and Vergati (1979:69) called attention to this aspect of the religious calendar and to the fact that it was governed by the Newar kings of Kathmandu valley.

Thus, in ordinary times, the gods remain abstract notions, and the three worlds are disengaged, work independently. But, let a crisis arise, let the gods intervene, and the shaman puts in the clutch. The community, through the cure, checks out the gears of the machinery.

Anxiety and guilt

But why do the Limbu give their shaman such power over them? Surely they must have some concrete interest in the exchange that is immediate and powerful.

During my fieldwork, I was well aware that there existed a relation between community consensus and the power of a great shaman. As I collected material, I had no trouble accepting that the souls of dead men dug up bear teeth, or that the monkey spirit freed a man's soul. All that belonged to their "beliefs" and "representations". But I had a different impression listening to the account of Yangphang's death. Later, when Kapoba related his recovery, and Pipunem - displeased, I fear, at sensing me a bit reticent - repeated his own story, the words took on a new consistency. They were telling me about a shaman's power. They began with the representations, and bit by bit everything began to mesh. As symbolic as it may be, Pirtung's power became strangely solid and frightfully effective. They showed me how it worked. The logic was rigourous. The witch's power, awesome. The great shaman does indeed have control over the gods. The community does everything in its power that this may be so.

And yet, most often in the normal course of events, I observed that the Limbus, like Mundunghe before his illness, do not take supernatural forces seriously. The less they hear of them the better. They have no wish to see them. At night, when the spirits come around, they would rather carry a club than a flashlight. When a Limbu leader walks "with his head held high", he fears neither his neighbors, nor marauding death, nor the spirit of the forest. I have always found this confidence in life astonishing: it is abosolute. Honor does not counteance fear of the gods.

Inversely, shame carries with it anguish and guilt. What deals Yangphang the final blow, at the time his death, is not when all is said and done, the anger of the spirits, but the fact that the shaman cannot be found just when the gods are on the warpath. Only he can control the spirits of the

Other World. Only he would capable of delivering him from the fear that is going to kill him.

"Is the human mind so made that it always looks elsewhere for the cause of its misfortune," as the psychoanalysts say?[18] Does the shaman create guilt, or guilt, the shaman? It is obvious that guilt and fear are part of the cure. They are an inherent part of the states dictated by honor and shame. Excluded from the concept of honor, they are the forces that motivate ritual action against shame. When the forest spirits overrun a house, the shaman can avoid anxiety only by playing on guilt. His client must search his past, find a fault, the violation of a taboo, an infringement of the rules instituted by the ancestors. Only then will, he be delivered from anxiety.

The community grants a great shaman an exhorbitant amont of power. But, in exchange, it derives an immediate and powerful advantage. The shaman takes upon his own shoulders the entire weight of their anxiety and guilt. Now he is the one who has to live with it.

Defining the shaman

With the passage of time, healing has received growing attention in works on Nepal: and this is a good thing. Anthropology on the whole sometimes tends to underestimate the therapeutic role of the shaman. Of course, anthropologists are always saying that shamans perform healings. But they rarely try to find out how. They consider this area to be tangential to their specialty, and a bit murky and dangerous, if the truth be told. They draw up a list of general and abstract representations, that, for a given population, account for the cases of illness (theft of soul, etc.). But they leave the study of the effectiveness of the cure to psychologists. And yet this is important. An illness is one of the instances in which the gods take on consistency and show themselves. The healing process is that privileged moment when the shaman imposes his world view on the community. In the course of treatement, complex representations surface as never before: pollution, separation, shame, "civilization", the "forest", etc., all the building blocks of mental structures. Symbolic realities become just plain realities. They provide access to the Limbu world. For this reason the study of the healing process is interesting in itself. But even more for the

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[18] Koupernick 1981:152.

light it sheds on the question raised by shamanism. Let us look at three examples.[19]

The shaman has a monoply on the transmission of myths. It is well known that a society reproduces itself through this transmission, identically, from one generation to the next. The shaman thus guarantees the social order. This is a problematic role. Paul Radin has already pointed out that, in any one society, most people take only a slight interest in metaphysical questions. If this be the case, it is difficult to understand why a community would entrust a handful of mystics and visionaries, which it regards with a certain scepticism, with such awesome authority over the organization of society.

The study of the healing process provides an explanation. The shaman's cure is effective only if his clients are willing to admit their transgressions. In other words, society accepts the shaman' s authority over the social order only to the extent that he is able to control the gods: this is to the advangage of society. The link between the function of healing and that of guaranteeing the social institutions is indissoluble; the relation between illness and civilization, obvious.

In the same way, the study of cures makes the sudden appearance, the birth of new spirits, intelligible. It accounts for the proliferation of gods in a given pantheon, for the variety of pantheons in different societies. In times of crisis - hail, epidemics, illness - there is a succession of shamans proposing divinations. The community seizes upon these diagnoses and seeks to interpret them. But, this time, the analysis does not succeed. The laymen of the community search their past in vain, not the slightest violation of a taboo, a model past. The gods therefore have no reason to be displeased. Illness, thunder, epidemics are senseless, they have no reason for being. The entire system of representation is on the brink of failure, on the verge of collapse. It is no longer credible. Only a highly gifted shaman, one capable of creating a new spirit, can save the system, get it to working again. It should be mentioned in passing that the birth of a new spirit implies new taboos, new social rules. It is therefore likely that each change in the pantheon corresponds to a development in the organization of society. The new spirit provides the foundation.

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19 Macdonald (1966:296) was the first to collect examples of healings; today his approach is becoming widely accepted. On the idea of healing, see Hamayon 1978.

In matters of shamanism, anthropologists most often submit their material to journals of religious history and let it go at that. They leave the task of defining the shaman to religious historians. It was Mircea Eliade's definition that provided a good number of Nepal specialists with an approach to the problem of shamanism[20] but this approach often leads up blind alleys: for example, the difference between a "sacrificing priest" and a "medium", which shares points with the distinction between white shamans and black shamans or, to adopt the Limbu terms, phedangmas and bijuwas. Eliade considers that, according to his definition, only the latter, that is the medium, can be regarded as a shaman.[21] And yet, a study of the way Limbus organize household space shows this is not an acceptable proposition: the *phedāṅgmā* and the *bijuwā* play inextricable complementary roles in a single, coherent system. It is the *bijuwā's* task to repel aggressions by the powers of the forest, to turn them out of the civilized space that the house represents for the Limbu (for the Tungus, this would be the clan, etc.). The *phedāṅgmā's* job is to reestablish contact with the invisible powers of the mountain or the Other World, whose presence in man is shown by the life in him. Both are shamans, and, although the intensity differs, both are mediums.[22]

Eliade's definition focuses on the shaman's ecstatic, mystic experience, the contrast between the heavenly journey and possession, etc.[23] and, because of this, deals exclusively with representations of the cosmos, uniquely with the realm of the gods. It neglects the body and society. It cannot account for the many questions that remain unanswered. An anthropological study of cures brings under consideration elements essential to a new definition of the shaman: his role as healer, which is closely linked to that of guardian of the social institutions, the interrelations among the three worlds - the body, society, the Other World. As a result, "religious" questions (black and white shamans, the birth of a spirit) are answered by examining the social organizations (household space, the evolution of customs); the same is true for questions of the body (the healer's role, illness) and society (the role of the guardian of order, developing a

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20 E.g. Reinhard 1976:15: Jones 1976:4; Watters 1975

21 Eliade 1968:22.

22 For a description of the various acts performed by mediums, and for the difference in their intensities, see Flournoy 1983.

23 Eliade ibid.

community history). The study of cures fosters a synthetic view of culture which is closer to the ways shamanic societies view the world. And above all, it shows the closeness of the tie between the shaman and society, something Eliade's definition is incapable of doing.

With these considerations in mind, I now wish to conclude on my point of method.

Analysis of the cure: a point of method

The present study is preliminary. It contains many approximations and a number of unanswered questions. There are also many overly ethnocentric definitions ("illness", "healing", "anxiety") which must be dealt with. Nevertheless, it seems that three phases can be discerned in shamanic healing, at least in the phedangma's practice.

1) The clinical examination in the course of which the community provides the shaman with information. In the case of illness, for example, the shaman, who is at home with these people, questions the patient on his recent past: his dreams, diet, activities, social relations, violations of taboos, spirit contacts, etc. He seizes on everything that might fill in his picture of the patient's history, his household, his settlement.

2) The symbolic horizon.[24] Then comes the diagnosis, the divination. The shaman indicates the spirit responsible[25], a ritual to be performed. He suggests a "symbolic horizon". Having begun with his client's misfortunes, the patient's body, his community's history, he uses the trance to gain access to the world of the gods. In my opinion, for great shamans there is a close tie between the information they gather during the clinical examination and the symbolic horizon they propose. A great shaman is first of all a "seer".

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[24] I have borrowed the term from De Martino (1965:148-53).

[25] Often several spirits are responsible. Our Occidental ideas are very different from the Oriental view. In the West, for example, homeopathic medicine is used to treat one organ. In China, herbal medicine looks at all the organs in order to treat a single one, but this one receives special attention. We find the same thinking in Limbu rituals. A whole group of spirits receives a chicken. But the spirit that caused the misfortune will end up with a pig.

3) The layman's interpretation. Finally the process of interpreting can begin: this involves the patient and his entourage, sometimes the community as a whole. Everyone tries to make sense of the symbolic horizon, to understand the relation between the illness and the spirit that caused it. From the world of the gods, we return to that of men. This phase is not the shaman' s worry. He may have been the first to see, but what he saw was of the Other World, to which he alone has access. The community must translate this into human terms by searching its past. A successful interpretation brings to light the violation of some taboo, a strain in the network of social relations. Sometimes this leads to confession by the guilty parties.[26]

An investigation of shamanic cures therefore cannot simply try to interpret the ritual in terms of myth. This study is indispensable, but it is only the first step. The next, it seems, must be to work on concrete cases: First, observing a complete cure through all three of its phases. Then gathering all available information on the patient's life history and that of his entourage. Finally, comparing these two blocks of information, bringing in the interpretation of the lay community where it has been carried out successfully.

It seems to me that the great shaman has both a liberating and a repressive role. He obliges people to choose, to take one path rather than another. To climb down off the fence. He opens up horizons. But there is a continuous exchange between his initiatives and those of the community. He serves as a midwife. He is not working for himself. He does not force himself on clients; he leaves them free. He remains free himself. He pays no attention to consequences. He is often cruel. That is one of his strengths, even if it sometimes backfires. With him, anything can happen. But there is only one way to capture the essence of the shaman: the key is provided by the community as it interprets his divination and the symbolic horizon it suggests.[27]

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[26] For examples of confession in connection with an initial divination, see Sagant 1982:170-71.

[27] A shaman who is inspired but hides the conclusions of his divination causes furious spirits "to rise" elsewhere and come back at him. It is a hard and fast rule to tell all. This sometimes leads to cruel predictions, accepted without revolt, something that always surprisd me when I was doing fieldwork. Once the ritual is over, the shaman often tends to profer some soothing explanation. But these are part of the general conversation over a beer, when everything is done. They are no longer

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of a sacred nature. The shaman is no longer the same, he has become human again. But he has spoken. The family has appropriated his words. The process of interpretation begins.

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