

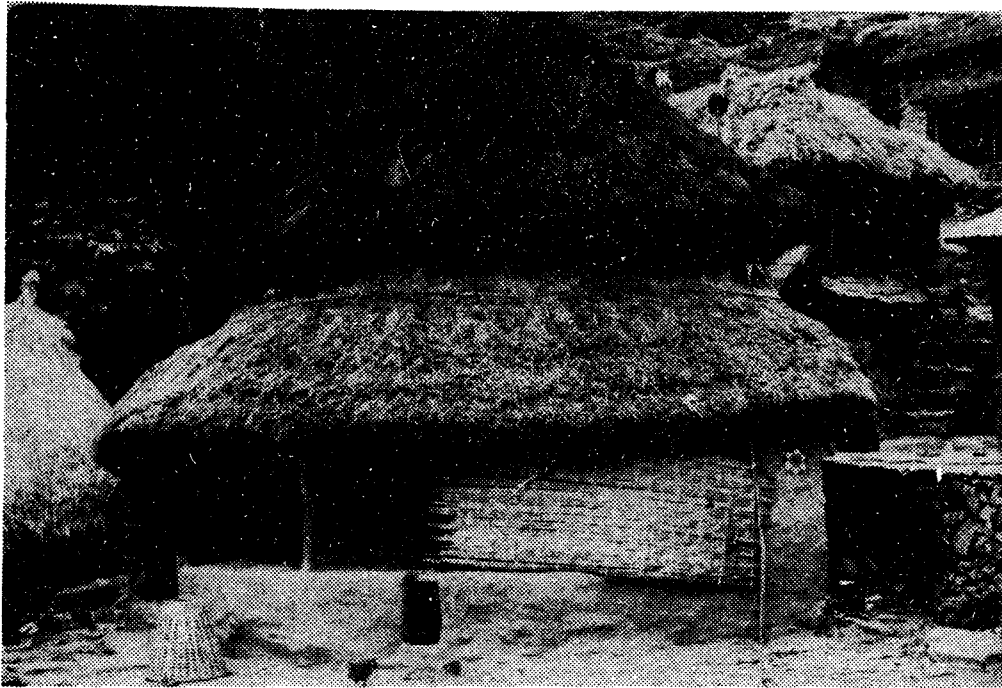
**THE PROCESS OF IDENTIFICATION AND  
SANSKRITIZATION:  
THE DURĀS OF WEST NEPAL**

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Sociologists and anthropologists favour words ending in "-zation", such as Hinduization, Brahminization, universalization, localization, westernization and Sanskritization. These are concepts used by them to describe the process and direction of social change in a community. Universalization, parochialization and localization (Marriott 1952) are concepts used to denote the constant interaction of cultural forms.

Another distinction, used by Robert Redfield in his studies of Mexican communities, is that between the Little and the Great Tradition. Milton Singer and McKim Marriott conducted some studies on social change in India using this conceptual framework. (Singh 1973:13)

Brahminization, Westernization and Sanskritization are concepts propounded by M. N. Srinivas (1952,1962,1966) in his studies of a group in South India known as the Coorgs. Culture, particularly in a sophisticated and caste-bound society, is considered to be the property of the people of upper castes. The values and norms of the higher castes are different from those of the members of the lower castes. Under the influence of certain developments, these values gradually become the property of the lower castes. However, culture is flexible and constantly changing under the impact of such factors as modernization, urbanization, industrial development and the spread of education. As a result the norms



1. A Typical Dura House in Sunduri Village



2. Dura Girls in Typical Gurung Dress

and values which once belonged to the people of the twice-born castes are now being adopted by the members of the once-born castes. In his study of the Coorgs in Mysore Srinivas found that the

lower castes, in order to raise their position in the caste hierarchy, adopted some customs of the Brahmins and gave up some of their own, considered to be impure by the higher castes. For instance, they gave up meat-eating, consumption of liquor and animal sacrifice to their deities. They imitated the Brahmins in matters of dress, food and rituals. By doing this, within a generation or so they could claim higher positions in the hierarchy of castes. To denote this process of mobility, Srinivas first used the term "Brahmanization". Later on, he replaced it by "Sanskritization." (Singh: 1973:5)

So normally, members of the lower castes, as a result of Sanskritization acquire the qualities and characteristics of the members of the upper castes.

In short, the term Sanskritization denotes mainly:

- a. Adoption by the lower castes of new values which are said to belong to members of the so-called upper castes.
- b. Expression of these new values and ideals in theological and scholarly literature written in the Sanskrit language.
- c. Adoption of the ways of life of the higher castes.
- d. A rise in status within the caste hierarchy.

Srinivas's concept of Sanskritization has attracted the attention of many scholars in sociology and anthropology (Marriott 1952, 1955; Opler 1956; Cohn, 1959; Chanana 1961; Stall 1963; Gould 1961; Harper 1959; Singer 1959; Bista 1971; Haimendorf 1966). They have used this conceptual framework in their study of socio-cultural change among various communities in South Asia.

This present article is concerned with the process of socio-cultural mobility of one of the tribal groups living in the middle hills of west Nepal in the context of Nepal and utilizing Srinivas's model of Sanskritization.

The particular tribal group I have chosen to study is the Durās<sup>1</sup> who are a mongoloid group living in West Nepal in the district of Lamjung. They are nearly three thousand in number and are distributed around a small hill called Duradana. They live along the hill at an altitude of approximately 4,000 ft. above sea level.

The theory of Sanskritization has been preferred in the present study of socio-cultural mobility among the Duras and in their relationships to various other ethnic groups of Nepal, because they exemplify the tendency of people of low caste to adopt the customs and rituals of the so-called higher castes, i.e. the twice-born (*dvija*). Adoption of Brahminical values and norms by non-Brahminical castes is an ongoing process in the attempt of lower caste peoples to attain a higher position in society. The adoption goes beyond values and ideas to the adoption of customs relating to marriage, conjugal relationships, kinship, food, and drink. At the same time people of the twice-born castes maintain their cultural superiority by adopting social values and norms drawn from the west. Today many Brahmins, especially those involved in politics and administration, use previously strictly forbidden foods such as liquor, chicken, pork, tomatoes, and onions; and they will accept food cooked at the tribal hearth or by people of a lower caste. It is difficult to find a young Brahmin who wears the *tupi* (The tuft of hair which is a sign of his caste status). The *Janai* (sacred thread) is worn only because of the fear of disapproval by the elders. This is in fact a reversion to norms and values of the once-born. D. N. Majumdar (1958) has called this process "de-sanskritization".<sup>2</sup> Upreti (1976:53,61) writing in a Nepali context, refers to it as the reverse of Sanskritization; and he calls these people "*nayā matwāli*" (new alcohol drinkers) or "cultural brokers". As Singer has rightly stated, Sanskritization and de-Sanskritization are reciprocal, cyclic processes.

It is well known that Nepal is the only Hindu Kingdom in the world, and that the caste system is the structural basis of Hindu society. In India, and in Nepal before the Gorkhali conquest, tribals were considered to be outside of the conceptual framework of the caste system. Hence, since Hamilton wrote shortly after the time of the Gorkhali conquest, Western

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<sup>1</sup> This article is based on my "Project Report on 'The Durās'", submitted to CNAS in 1982, and the data were collected at Sundure ("The Dura Village") in Lamjung.

<sup>2</sup> Quoted in K. Singh, *Rural Sociology* (1979: Lucknow, Prakashan Kendra) : 172

scholars (especially anthropologists studying Nepal) have continued to emphasise the Hindu-non-Hindu dichotomy; and the emphasis given to this distinction has sharply increased in vehemence in recent times. (Sharma 1978:3) However, since the Rana times the tribals have been considered as belonging to the low *sūdra* Hindu category. (Sharma 1978:6) The old code of 1854 presented a four-fold classification of society into which all castes and ethnic groups were subsumed. This social universe is referred to in the code by Prithivi Narayana Shah's phrase *cār varṇa chattis jāt* ("The Four *Varnas* and The Thirty-six Castes"). The names of the four *varṇas* and the order of the hierarchy are as follows:

1. *Tāgadhāri* = Castes wearing the sacred thread; consists of the Brahmins, Thakuris and Chettris.
2. *Matwālī* = Alcohol drinking castes; all the tribal groups are gathered in this class.
3. *Pānī na calne choi chiṭo hālnu napanne* = Low service castes whose touch is not defiling, but from whom water cannot be accepted by higher castes.
4. *pānī na calne choi chiṭo hālnu parne* (Quoted from Sharma 1978:7) = Untouchable Castes

This code became the most important instrument for regulating inter-caste behaviour and for applying social control in the kingdom as a whole. (Sharma 1978:3) The legal code thus included the tribals in the caste structure and was therefore an official step which ended tribe and began caste.

At present the process of caste mobility and the adoption of social values and norms of the twice-born by the once-born is widespread. The groups involved in this process are the *matwālī* castes, the low service castes and the untouchable castes. They have developed a craze to show that their caste status is really higher than presently accepted by other groups.

One of the ways of doing this is to claim that their land of origin is different from their present settlement and that they are blood relations of people of higher castes. Below are some examples of this process whereby people of lower castes move from their Little Tradition into the Great Hindu Tradition.

Early in the last century Hamilton already noted that many of the ruling class (Thakuri) in the Chaubise kingdoms were in fact Magar in origin, and that they had arbitrarily raised themselves to Rajput status. (Hamilton 1971:18) Sharma notes that "some of the sub-clans of the Magar tribe in central Nepal (such as Bhujel, Budhathoki, Mudule Khadga, Thapa, Gharti, and Rana) and the liquor consuming tribes of western Nepal (The *matwāli* Chetris), may have been promoted to the status of the Chetris by making them absorb gradually the 'superior' culture of the 'twice-born'." (Sharma 1973:72). In this context even people who had a claim to Rajput status took steps to validate their claim by showing links to Rajputana. Hodgson relates a story of the kings of Gorkha sending emissaries to Mewar to explain their origin and social position to Rajputs there in order to get recognition of an equal rank from them. (Hodgson 1972:38) The Hindus of Nepal were held to be inferior in rank to the Hindus of the plains. This was especially stressed with the Rajputs (who in Nepal are more commonly called Thakuri and regarded as a caste of the ruling class) and the Chettris who in the Nepalese caste hierarchy come one step below the Thakuri. (P.R. Sharma 1978:7)

The Kusundas (Ban Raja), one of the tribal groups of Nepal, inform us that they are the offspring of Thakuris and that they are therefore related to high caste (twice-born) people. Hence they claim Thakuri clan names as their own: Singh, Sahi, Khan. (Reinhard 1976:6) The Chepangs, one of the recently discovered tribal groups, claim that they are the descendants of Sitaji, the wife of Ram. They prefer to call themselves "Praja" rather than "Chepang", their tribal name. The Thakalis of Thak Khola Bhot claim Thakuri status by imitating surnames ending in *-chand* (a common Thakuri name) and claiming that they migrated from Jumla in West Nepal to the Thak Khola area. Bista writes that many Thakalis believe their ancestors came from Sinja in the west where their close kinsmen were all Thakuris. It was only after they settled in Thak, that they began to practise Lamaism and came to be known as Thakalis. (Bista 1980:90) The Bhotiya of the Kumaon hill in Pithorgarh District claim to be Rajputs as do the Saukas, or Byanshui, a people of the same area. (Manzardo 1976:83) The Byanshi are

called Sauka, meaning "rich men" by the local Hindus. The term Sauka will be used in this paper to mean the entire ethnic group, living both in Nepal and India, while Byanshi will refer to the strictly Nepalese population of this group. The Byanshi prefer to be called Sauka, but we feel this is a useful distinction because the Sauka living in India have a slightly different clan structure, many more clans and a different economy. Sauka has been used by Raipa (1974) to refer to the Indian population of this group. We will continue this designation, and since the term Byanshi is derived from the Byansh region of Darchula, we will use Byanshi for the people living in Byansh.

In the same way the Dhimals, an indigenous group of the eastern Nepal Tarai, have begun calling themselves Mallick. The Mallick are like the Chhetris of Nepal and in the Tarai are known as Kayastha who have a reputation for being clever people. Though they are not Malla Thakuri, they are superior to the Dhimals in the context of caste hierarchy. In the same vein, the Devakis<sup>3</sup> from Baitadi and Dadeldhura in Far Western Nepal

<sup>3</sup> In my opinion, these people were religious prostitutes. See the following:

*"Devamandirmā saphāsugghar garne aratiko belā devamūrti samaksa bhaktipūrvak gānā gāune ra nr̥tya garne kāmko nimitta yubāyuvati'āi devadāsī prathā bhanincha. Yasko udhāran Nepāl, bhārat ādi āeskā dhārmik itihāsmā hāmi pāuchaū. Prācin Babylonian, Mesopotamia, Greece ādi paschamī desmā pani ek kisimkā nartakiharū mandirmā raheko pāincha," ( T. B. Shrestha p. 103) "Dās prathā arthik kāranko upaj ho bhane devadāsī pratha cāhī dhārmik kāranko upaj ho bhannamā atyukti naholā. Nepālmā pani licchavikālmā devadās devadāsī prathāko astitva thiyo bhanne pramāṇ prakāśmā āsakeko cha, Isvi sātaū śatabhīmā Licchavi rajā narendrako ananta Liṅgeśvarko abhilekhle yas viśayamā nikkai prakāś pārchā, Mallakāiko antya ra ādhunik kāl. śūrusamma pani paśupatiko mandirmā devadāsīharūko astitva raheko thiyo bhanne kurakā nirnaya so tāmrāpatrabāta bhaeko cha. (Ibid, p. 104)*

*"Kunai kunai aitihasik ghaṭānāle pani nayā samudāyako sirjanā gardo rahecha udāharānko nimti i. 1437 (B. S. 1484) dekhj i. 1450 samma kunāū ra dotiko yuddhalāi lina sakincha. Rājā nirayapāladekhj adhinastha kunāū pradeśle dotisaṅga bāhra barse yuddha gari svatantratā hāsil gari coḍyo. Kumāūnko rājā bhāratīcandrale gareko so katakmā kumāūkā ladaku sena doti bhubhāgma kabja garna puge. Tyasari katakmā doti āeko viśāl kamāūnko sena dotiharūkā nāriharūmāthi vyabhicā. garna samskāra rahit santān janma hūdā jādā chorilāi 'katakāvali' ra chorāilāi 'nāyak' bhanne pad diiyo. 'Katakāvali' daivecchāle janmeka hūdā 'devadāsī' hūnā gai devakikā rūpmā parinat huna gae. Pachi ti devakiharū karmacārikā viśaya vāsanā purā garne sādhana banna gae." (Subedi: 13)*

" Among certain of these people in Dadeldhura and Baitadi who indeed wear the sacred thread and claim the status of Chhetris there is a practice of selling their daughters to rich Thakuri or Brahmans who dedicate the girls they buy in the name of certain deities. According to local tradition these girls

claim to be descendants of Malla Thakuris. In these cases the tendency to show relationships to higher castes is really a process of Rajputization rather than Sanskritization. The advantages of this are obvious, because all across the hills the "Rajputs are commonly called Thakuri and regarded as a caste of the ruling class." (Sharma 1978:)

The Gurungs claim to be Thakuris from Kanauj and Bundelkanda who moved east to Parbat, Syangja, Kaski and Lamjung in Nepal. (Gurung 1977:9-26) They have been abandoning their traditional dress: the *bhoro* (a short shirt worn by men), *kachhad* (the kilt), *peti* (a wide belt), *cola* (a woman's blouse), *ghalek* (a cloth worn over the shoulders by women in Western Nepal), *pauka* (a long piece of cloth used by women around the waist), and *guniu* (a cotton sari which is popular in the countryside). They are abandoning their age-old occupation of sheep herding. They are slowly forgetting their language and traditional customs such as *rodi*, *ghanu*, *nogar*, *lhoba*, and *pupue*.<sup>4</sup> In place of these they are adopting the customs and rituals of higher castes.

On the other hand, certain other groups, traditionally lower than the Gurungs, have begun to imitate Gurung customs, thereby moving up to the place in the scale recently vacated by the Gurungs. Haimendorf notes that the people of Bargaan Mustang, who until one or two generations ago were known as Bhotias (people of Tibetan origin) from Dolpo, have started to call themselves Gurung. (Haimendorf 1975:152) At present they have become Dorje-Gurung, a combination of Gurung and their tribal name Dorje or Angdorge. This has come about as a direct result of their recent growing contacts with people outside of Bargaan. In the same way the Khyampas have deliberately adopted the name Gurung, but they use it only when communicating with Hindus, not within their own group. Today about 90% of these people use the caste designation Gurung. The Khyampas believe that Gurung is a specific rank within the original Hindu caste order and are not aware that it refers to another Tibeto-Burman ethnic

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when they become mature can cohabit with any man they want and become prostitutes, but it is irreligious for them to marry a man. As a result they produce children who do not have an officially recognised father, such a man is called *devko* and women *devki* or *devadahi* which means attendants of a deity. These women, of course, perpetuate the trade and custom by remaining 'single' all of their lives. (Bista 1971:11)

<sup>4</sup> "Jag-aimaile jhai logne manisic panj lamo kapal, paine huda pracin kalma nepalihartile bhoeliharwai deko nam." *Nepali birha Sabha Kos*



group in Nepal. Rauber notes that the Humli Khyampas no longer eat yak and beef, and they have given up polyandrous marriages. Only the older Khyampas remember that their grand-fathers used to eat yak meat; the young ones deny this altogether. The same holds true for polyandrous marriages. The younger generations cannot imagine polyandry, and they even say that it fills them with disgust to think that in former times a wife was shared by several brothers. (Rauber 1980:72) Rai reports that some of the Khyampas of Jumla-Humla claim that they are Matwali Chhetris. (Rai 1973:65) Because of their contacts with high caste Hindus through their seasonal trade, they have learnt much and borrowed a lot from them. They now feel that the traditional tribal name used to refer to them (*Jād*<sup>5</sup>) is derogatory and degrading.

The Gharti of Daraun-Sirubari village, the birthplace of the present writer, are a low caste group whose function was to carry the litter at marriage ceremonies. Today they are fond of calling themselves Gurung. They can speak the Gurung language as a native speaker and are adopting the Gurung customs. This has made it easier for them to Join the British or Indian army. Today a young Gharti ignores his traditional occupation of carrying the litter for marriage ceremonies. The *Kasains* (Newar butchers) of the Kathmandu Valley prefer to be called Sahi rather than their clan name. In addition to this they are adopting the customs of higher caste Newars such as the Shresthas and Pradhans.

The process of Sanskritization among the Thakalis of Panch-Gaunle (i.e. the five villages: Thini, Syang, Marpha, Chaira and Chim) shows a layered imitation. Despite the fact that all of the people of these villages are descendants of a common ancestor, the Thakalis of four of these villages (i.e. all except Thini) have adopted new clan names: Lalchan, Jagorchan, Pannachan and Hirachan. This appears to be in imitation of the wealthier and higher Thakalis of Thag Sat Saya who have four clans known all over the country as Gauchan, Battachan, Sherchan and Tulachan. (See Dungel: 2044:np) At the same time all the Thakalis have been adopting many Hindu values and beliefs and mixing these with their traditional Lamaist practices. They have abandoned their Tibetan style of dress, diet, customs, and rituals. They have assumed speech affectations of the higher castes. Thus

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<sup>5</sup> See Gurung 1977.

a Thakalni in her *bhatti*<sup>6</sup> will ask her guests or customers, "*bhujā thapnu huncha ki?*" ("Do you want more rice?"). *Bhujā* is a high class word for cooked rice formerly used almost exclusively by Thakuris.

Modern day Magars hate having a pig pen or breeding swine, both of which were common formerly. As Sharma notes it has long been known that Magar genealogies get lost over time and that "Magars allegedly reappear with Thakuri names." (Sharma 1978:8) Today Tamangs hesitate to eat beef, though "many Nepalese tribal groups, until about two hundred years ago, appear to have been beef eaters". (Sharma 1978:5) This is the result of a Sanskritization which took place during the Rana period. "During the Rana period, even some of the more pronouncedly Mongoloid ethnic groups, such as the The Tamangs and Thakalis, applied to the government for initiation into the Hindu religious tradition through the imposition of restrictions on beef eating and through the acceptance of brahmins as priests." (Sharma 1973:73)

Hindus in the Khalanga Panchayat in far west Nepal claim that up to a decade ago, the Byanshi were considered untouchable by Hindus. The Hindus practised *chito halnu*, that is, the sprinkling of water after touching an untouchable, whenever they inadvertently came into contact with these people. Today these people claim, through various legends, to be descended from Sahi Thakuris from Humla, or alternately, they claim to be Rajputs from Chittor in Rajasthan. (Manzardo 1976: 112) Dahal notes that the Athpahariya Rais of Dhankuta in east Nepal are slowly introducing the Hindu *Samskāras* (life cycle rites into their day-to-day life. (Dahal 1985:100) They now observe certain annual and life-cycle ceremonies such as the veneration of the cow during Laxmi Puja, the first rice eating ceremony, the hair cutting ceremony, the *puttā-badau* (a special ceremony performed in the name of the first male child<sup>7</sup>), and the observation of pollution for three days during the menses.

In regard to the Limbus of eastern Nepal Upreti notes:

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<sup>6</sup> A local Bar.

<sup>7</sup> *puttā badau* is a Rai word and denotes a special ceremony performed in the name of the first male child similar to the Gurung *putpue* ceremony.

Many Limbu have abandoned the traditional Limbu burial custom and instead have adopted the Hindu practice of cremation of the dead. They have also started following the Brahminical practice of observing 13 days of pollution after a death of the family in place of their own traditional three days' observance. Some Limbu have even begun to employ Brahmin priests in lieu of the Limbu shaman *phedangma* in performing funeral rites. Rich Limbu families have also started employing a Brahmin priest to conduct other Hindu ceremonies at their homes as well. (Upreti 1976: 53-4)

In the same manner some of the lower occupational castes of the Tarai, such as the Teli (crushers of oil seeds and dealers in oil), the Kalawars (liquor dealers) and the Sundis (liquor distillers) have surreptitiously changed their family name from Sahu or Sah to the Thakuri title Saha and have even married Chhetri girls.

In this manner the process of Sanskritization has been a kind of egalitarian tendency within the caste system and has afforded a scope, however limited, for social, political and economic mobility within the caste hierarchy. (Sharma 1973:73)

### III

The central focus of this paper is mainly on the Duras of west Nepal, one of the alcohol drinking castes who have been ranked below the Gurungs and above the Tamangs in the local caste hierarchy. In descending order the hierarchy is: Bahun, Jaisi, Chhetri, Gurung, Dura, Tamang, and untouchables. An attempt will be made to analyse how the Duras have been adopting the social customs and rituals of the Gurungs and the values and norms of the Brahmins in the context of Nepal. The Dura reaction to Hinduism is not surprising if one compares them to other ethnic groups of Nepal like the Thakali, Gurung, Magar, and Chepang. Though this is a fairly recent case of a rise in status or caste mobility within the theory of Sanskritization, the Duras are actually of historical importance in the development of Nepal. At the time when the Baise and Chaubise ("Twenty-two" and "Twenty-four") principalities were being established in western Nepal at the end of the fifteenth century, they were instrumental in the establishment of a Shah ruler in Lamjung by the removal of the Ghale King. (Adhikari 1973:74)

The Duras look like Gurungs in appearance and features. They have been serving in the British and Indian Armies for a long time and fought in both the first and second World Wars, but as Gurungs not as Duras. During my field visit in 1982 when I interviewed the Chief District officer of Lamjung, I found out that the Duras were asking that the name Gurung be entered on their citizenship papers instead of their own name. They explained that it was necessary to show citizenship papers to be recruited into the British Army and that it was easier to get admission with a Gurung identity. Thus the young, uneducated Dura boys have benefited by the popularity gained by the Gurungs and other similar ethnic groups famous for their long service as disciplined door-keepers and good fighters in the British Army. This seems to have been the main motive for their eagerness to be known as Gurungs.

First of all I will try to analyse how they have been adopting the customs, rituals and ways of life which once belonged to the Gurungs. That they were once considered to be lower than the Gurungs is indicated by the still current attitudes of other people in Lamjung. In January 1982 when I was going to Lamjung for my field study I happened to meet a woman, about thirty-two years of age, in a small teashop on the way. I inquired about the Duras and asked her, "*Durāharū katā patti baschan?*" ("Where do the Duras live?") She replied with a derogatory reference to them: "*Ti ghartiharūlai kina khojnubho?*" (What do you want with those Ghartis?) The terms "Gharti" which she used clearly indicated her opinion that they are people of a low status. I soon came to know that they were looked down upon by all the neighbouring villagers. Yet, today all the cultural possessions of the Gurung community have become the property of the Duras through a process of Sanskritization in the context of the local caste hierarchy.

The most interesting and distinctive element of the Gurung culture is the *roḍi*, the custom of evening meetings of the young people for entertainment. This has now been transferred to the Dura community. Generally the Dura boys and girls meet in the *roḍi* house and entertain themselves throughout the evening and long into the night by singing, dancing, drumming and joking. At the same time the *roḍi* can hardly be found today in Gurung villages even in Lamjung, Parbat and Kaski, the densely populated and original land of the Gurungs. In the same way that most important socio-religious event known in Gurung as *ghāñtu* (a traditional ritual dance whose story is, unexpectedly, Hindu in theme, [Gurung 1977:64-93]) is in vogue

among the Duras. They perform it on the full moon of Baisakh (April-May) with full enthusiasm and joy. This traditional dance has become a legend to the young Gurungs. Similarly *putpote*,<sup>8</sup> a ceremony held for the eldest male child of a family which was formerly observed among the Gurungs, is now observed by the Duras with full enjoyment for a whole night. Death ceremonies among the Duras are akin to those of the Gurungs. Though the Duras claim to be Hindu they observe the Gurung ceremonies known in the Gurung language as *mh̄isibr̄ī* (disposal of the body) and *pai* (concluding ceremony); and they need Gurung shamans for the performance of these ceremonies.

One interesting Gurung custom known as *nogar* (a type of co-operative agriculture work party) has become prevalent in Dura villages. The young boys and girls join the *nogar* and work together turn by turn at each member's house. Another custom known as *lhoba* ("to help") is also practised by the Duras. It consists of a group of young boys and girls who offer their services without payment to the village old couples and to sick families. Both of these customs are in the process of on-going disappearance in Gurung villages. Furthermore, the Gurung of Kathmandu and Eastern Nepal have very little knowledge about these customs.

The dress and ornaments of the Duras are similar to that of the Gurungs. They drink liquor, and eat chicken and buffalo meat like the Gurungs. People say that they are looked down upon because they also eat pork, which the Gurungs won't eat. However, during my one month's stay with them, I saw no evidence of their eating pork. One area where they remain culturally distinct from the Gurungs is in their language and their folk songs. They have a distinctive folk song, known as *Durā bākhā*, which is still very popular in Lamjung. There are a few Dura families in Thuloswanra, Chisanku and Vorletar villages who have changed their caste name by paying a small amount of cash to the Gurung *bhalādmis* ("great men"). Hence they are called *pāñc mohore* and *sāt mohore* Gurungs (i.e. Gurungs by the payment by five or seven coins of 50 paise).

From the above data it is clear that the Duras have taken the Gurungs as their reference group as described by Merton. The result has been a dynamics of ethnic mobility within the relatively fluid status hierarchy of

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<sup>8</sup> *putepute* comes from *pulpule* or *pulpulāunv*. which means to "love the child".

Nepal. However, within the framework of the local caste hierarchy, it is rather a process of Sanskritization of a group of people lower than the Gurungs.<sup>9</sup>

Concurrent with the process of adopting Gurung customs and rituals I observed another process at work, namely, the assimilation of the values and norms of the high caste Hindus. Though they practise Lamaist rituals, the Duras claim that they are followers of Hinduism, because they believe in the Hindu gods and goddesses. They seem to have become great devotees of the goddess Durga. On the auspicious day of *caitrāṣṭami* many people gather at the temple of Turlungkot to worship the goddess Durga. At this time the Duras are the priests (*pūjāri*) in the temple. They generally observe all the Hindu feasts like Dasain, Dipavali, Janaipurnima, Sankranti, etc. They have begun to employ Brahmin priests to conduct Hindu ceremonies at their homes. Religious activities such as *rudri* and *Satyanārāyaṅko pūjā* (recitation of holy texts) are conducted by a Brahmin priest. They have pictures of Hindu gods and goddesses in their homes; and some of the Dura girls can be seen worshipping at the pictures every morning by offering *jal*, *phūl*, *acheta ra dūp* (fresh water, flowers, rice and incense) after their bath.. Similarly, they consult a Brahmin priest about the marriage of their sons and daughters, about the building of a new house, and about the auspicious day and time (*sait*) for leaving home on some ambitious project. They think that cow milk is pure and necessary for religious ceremonies. At present I find that they clean their cooking pots both morning and evening after their meal, whereas the ethnic groups ordinarily clean their cooking pots only every few days. In the mean-time they cook their food in the same "defiled" pots until they get around to cleaning them. They learned this from their contact with Brahmins. Every morning they scrub their door with red earth. Nowadays a menstruating Dura woman is prohibited from cooking food and using water in the family for three days. During this

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<sup>9</sup> In the modern Nepal context, however, the name of the ethnic group--Gurung, Tamang, Magar, etc. is used as a caste designation. "The identification with castes, which has occurred since this generation only, shows that the Khyampas are trying to move into the Hindu Social System. Caste placement vests them with a distinct status and makes it possible for the Hindus to identify the Khyampas within their own social categories. The Kyampas' caste names have of course been chosen deliberately and they are used only when communicating with the Hindus, not within their own group. The most frequent (about 90%) caste designation used nowadays is 'Gurung'. The Khyampas believe that Gurung is a specific rank within an original Hindu order and are not aware that it refers to another Tibeto-Burma ethnic group in Nepal." (Rauber:7-8)

period she must not touch others, and if she is touched by anyone, that person must receive *sunpāni* (gold-water) from other members of the family. A woman remains apart and is prohibited from using water or cooking food for twenty-two days after *sutkeri*, "giving birth to a child". Like the caste-Hindus, the Duras no longer celebrate marriages during the months of *Caitra* (March-April) and *Kartik* (October-November). They invite *damais*, the traditional tailor musicians used by the caste-Hindus, to play Nepalese drums, trumpets, clarions, etc. at their marriage ceremonies. All of these examples show how the Duras have been influenced by the Brahmins of Duradanda.

Besides the Gurung customs and the Brahminical values, they have also imported a lot from Western countries in their dress, diet, manners, and even in their daily speech. many of the old Duras are retired military men, and many of the young boys are serving in the British or Indian Army. So they use a few Hindi words and a few English words when they talk to others. A few ex-military officers have built European type toilets, and modern houses with a kitchen, and with separate bed and living rooms. They have brought home modern furniture, cameras, cassette recorders and radios. The men folk wear a western style of dress such as a suit, tie and shoes; whereas the women wear the *lungi*, sari, blouse, locket and *chappals* (rubber sandals). They listen to Radio Nepal, All India Radio, and sometimes talk about the BBC and the Voice of America.

#### IV

Social stratification is a characteristic of all societies. At the same time, an absolutely immobile socio-cultural system is an impossibility. So the adoption of ideas, values and norms of the so-called upper castes by the lower castes is an ongoing process resulting from various factors such as the spread of education, urbanization, and communication. With this conceptual framework in mind, I chose to analyse how the Duras, one of the alcohol-drinking castes of Nepal, have been adopting the customs, rituals, social values and norms which once belonged only to the twice-born castes in the same way that other tribals of Nepal--such as the Thakalis, Gurungs, Rais and Limbus--have done. My intention in this paper has been to show how the Duras of West Nepal have experienced socio-cultural changes and caste mobility in a way similar to what has been experienced by other tribal communities of south Asia. (See Gould 1961; Cohn 1955; Singh 1958.)

The theory of Sanskritization propounded by M. N. Srinivas has been considered a useful tool and has been widely applied by many sociologists and anthropologists in their analyses of social change in South Asia. Its usefulness has again been shown in our study of the Duras of West Nepal: "Sanskritization is the process by which a low Hindu caste, or tribal, or other group, changes its customs, rituals, ideology and way of life in the direction of high, frequently, twice born caste." (Srinivas 1966:6)

Among the Duras this process of Sanskritization has been a delayed process, set in motion over five hundred years after the initial contact between khaje Dura and Kushmakhar Gimire around 1550 B.S (A.D. 1492-93) which resulted in their launching a joint effort to bring Yashobrahma Shah into Lamjung as their ruler instead of the Ghale Kings, the original local chieftains. (See Gurung 1984.) The process of the slow infiltration of Hindu customs and practices, and the process of identification of themselves with another caste (the Gurungs) show that the Duras are trying to move into the Hindu Social System. Their socio cultural dynamics do not end here, but constitute an ongoing process accelerated by the Dura youth, especially teachers and college students.



## Glossary

- Durā* - name of an ethnic group (like Thakuri, Gurung, Magar).  
*Durādāndā* - name of a small hill village named after the Duras. At present inhabited by Brahmans, Duras and other people.  
*ghalek* - a cloth worn over the shoulder by women in West Nepal.  
*ghāntu* - a Gurung dance-drama performer each spring.  
*guniu* - a country synonym for the sari.  
*jād* - a name given in ancient times by Nepalis to the "Bhote" peoples because they kept long hair like women.  
*kachad* - a dhoti worn neatly tucked in.  
*lhoba* - "to help"  
*mhi sibari* - the disposal of the corpse by burial or cremation; "to die"  
*nogar* - cooperative work party organised by the rodi; an agriculture work party.  
*pai* - final memorial rites for the dead (*arghaur* in Nepali)  
*putpate* - from *pulpule* which means to live a child,  
*putta-bada* - a cloth worn over the shoulders by women in West Nepal.

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