

RELIGION IN TAMANG SOCIETY:
A BUDDHIST COMMUNITY IN NORTHERN NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the interrelationship of the religious rituals, beliefs and specialists of a Tamang community in northern Nepal, where a variant of Tibetan Mahāyāna Buddhism ('Lamaism') is found in tandem with Hindu festivals and an array of traditional tribal beliefs and practices including shamanism.

A comprehensive account is first given of the community, including its economic basis and social structure. Particular attention is paid to household composition and the domestic cycle, and to clan and lineage structures. The importance of ritual in strengthening social bonds is noted, as is the way in which utilitarian activities are subordinated to religious values and ordered according to symbolic ideas of time and space.

Three ritual modes are then described and discussed. First, those concerned with the protection of the individual and the community, either by appeals to the traditional village guardians or by invoking the Buddhist protective deities. Second, the use of exorcism to expel evil, personified as the demons and witches believed to cause illness, misfortune and death. Third, rituals which, by means of offerings to the high Buddhist deities, seek access to their divine power and compassion in order to transform the worshippers.

In the course of this account the religious ideas which structure the rituals are encountered, as are the symbolic forms through which they are realised. Then the selection, training and empowerment of religious specialists are examined, as is their role as mediators between men and the gods. Finally, the different religious complexes are shown to be linked by common procedures and strategies for dealing with external threats to individual and communal well-being - and hence in competition with one another, but differentiated and opposed by their attitude towards traditional authority. Additionally they are hierarchically ordered in terms of values and moral range.

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PREFACE

This thesis is an anthropological study of the religious dynamics of a community of Tamangs living near the northern borders of Nepal in Rasuwa District at the confluence of the Bhote Kosi and Langtang Kholā rivers. It is based on fourteen months fieldwork between April 1977 and June 1978 conducted in and around the village of Syabru, which is situated near what was once a major trade route between Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal, and the Tibetan town of Kyirong. This area recommended itself for study for a number of reasons: the ethnic homogeneity of its population, unusual in the multi-ethnic society of Nepal; its location at the juncture of Buddhist Tibet and Hindu Nepal, strongly influenced by both cultures; and the changing social and political circumstances which have seen the reduction of links with Tibet and the increasing participation of once remote communities in the developmental processes of a modernising society. These factors suggested that the area would provide an interesting opportunity to observe the intermingling of and interplay between competing religious and social ideologies.

The study could not have been undertaken without the interest, encouragement and assistance of many people and institutions, to all of whom I am deeply grateful. Foremost amongst these are the people of Syabru who willingly permitted me to participate in their lives for a brief period and who extended to me and my family the neighbourly hospitality which is such an important feature of village life. As the result of a promise of anonymity made to the villagers those mentioned in the text have been given pseudonyms. However, I was especially fortunate in finding in 'Nyima' not only a landlord but an engaging, humorous and knowledgeable friend; his neighbours became mine and, like him and his family, contributed greatly to the success of the fieldwork.

In Kathmandu I benefitted from the assistance of the authorities of Tribhuvan University, particularly Dr P R Sharma, Dean of the Research Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, in securing the necessary permission to work in Nepal. During time spent in the Nepalese capital I was exceptionally fortunate to enjoy the hospitality of Dr Boudewijn de Smeth of UNDP and his wife Elsy Lewin; also that of Simon Davey and Dudley Spain at the British Embassy.

I should also like to thank all those who encouraged my interest in anthropology, especially Dr Ursula Sharma of the University of Keele, Professor Christoph von Fürer-Haimendorf to whose pioneering work in Nepalese anthropology every student of that subject is indebted and, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, Professor Adrian Mayer who provided the opportunity for me to pursue my studies there and Dr Lionel Caplan who stimulated and directed their course and patiently supervised my work. I am also grateful to Dr Richard Burghart of SOAS for reading the completed manuscript and to Dr Martin Williams for many lively discussions on the subject of Tibetan Buddhism. Naturally the final responsibility for the views expressed here remains mine alone.

My thanks are also due to the institutions which provided the funds without which realisation of this project would have been much more difficult: the Social Science Research Council of Great Britain for the major part of the finance; the Central Research Fund of the University of London for assistance with interpreting and the provision of photographic and sound-recording materials; and the Trustees of the Radcliffe-Brown Memorial Fund for Research in Social Anthropology for valued assistance during the writing-up period.

Lastly my gratitude to Kathie and Tara who shared the fieldwork experience and contributed to it immeasurably.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

Three languages are in current use in the part of northern Nepal where this study was conducted. In everyday use the Tamang people speak their own unwritten Tibeto-Burman tribal language which they refer to simply as 'Tamang tan' - Tamang language. The language they use with officials, administrators, traders and service castes visiting the village, and themselves when they go on trading trips to Kathmandu is the national language, Nepali. This is spoken by all men with varying degrees of fluency, by about half the adult women and by some of the older children. There is also a considerable admixture of Nepali words in Tamang speech, particularly those referring to land and certain crops perhaps relatively recently introduced, and to matters such as taxation, education and those trappings of modern life which have penetrated the area. Finally there is Tibetan, the language of Buddhist religious practice in its classical form, and in its modern form of the 300 or so Tibetan refugees who live in the area; additionally there are Tibetan dialects spoken by some of the remote communities of the border areas. The Tamang priesthood are literate in Tibetan and most adults know prayers in Tibetan and the basic terminology of Buddhist ritual. Again a number of Tibetan expressions are used in Tamang speech and many words clearly have a Tibetan origin, both those concerned with religion and various others.

The principles employed here for transcription and transliteration of these three languages are chosen primarily to give maximum readability while paying regard as far as possible to scholarly exactitude. Thus I have not employed the phonetic conventions suggested by, for example, Taylor, Everitt and Tamang (1972) in their vocabulary of Tamang spoken in Nuwakot District (which differs markedly from Rasuwa District), for they would make for extremely cumbersome reading. Instead Tamang words with no obvious Nepali or Tibetan derivation are represented as they sound to an English listener and would be spoken by an English speaker. Obviously this is a rather imprecise method - for example, it loses the tonal distinctions - but confusion is minimised because the context makes the meaning of similarly spelled words clear and readability is greatly improved.

However, in the case of words which are clearly Nepali in origin

they are identified by (N) and transliterated according to the system used by Turner (1931). The phonetic character of Nepali spelling gives a clear guide to the pronunciation of the word.

Additionally, words of Tibetan origin are identified by (Tib.) and the Tibetan spelling is given in brackets as a further aid to identification. Here the system of transliteration proposed by Wylie (1959), which avoids the need for diacritical marks, is used.

Finally, certain words which are generally familiar in English (e.g. guru, lama, karma) or which must bear a heavy weight of repetition (e.g. gomba, torma) are treated as English words and are not underlined or further identified after the first appearance.

A Glossary of all foreign words in the text is appended, together with a list of Tibetan names with their correct transliteration.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Scope of the thesis

This dissertation is a study of religion and society amongst a Himalayan tribal group living in northern Nepal. The Tamangs of the upper Trisuli river (Bhote Kholā) live at the interface of two great cultural traditions -- Tibet to the north where until recently a unique brand of Buddhism flourished, and Nepal to the south, a caste-based Hindu society. For the past two hundred years the Tamangs have been under the political control of Nepal whose socio-cultural system has influenced them deeply. But although the people observe some Hindu festivals and practices the predominant religion is Tibetan Buddhism coupled with an indigenous tradition of shamanism.

Although such a mixture could be described as syncretistic this would obscure many of the most interesting questions about it. How are these various religious forms linked or differentiated in terms of their ideas, values and symbols? How are their respective religious specialists distinguished in terms of powers, status, training and roles, and to what extent is there conflict or cooperation between them? What is the place of ritual in village life and what is the significance of different religious styles? How do different ritual forms give substance to the religious ideas and beliefs which underlie them and to what extent are we dealing here with a coherent religious system? These are some of the questions to which the present study is addressed.

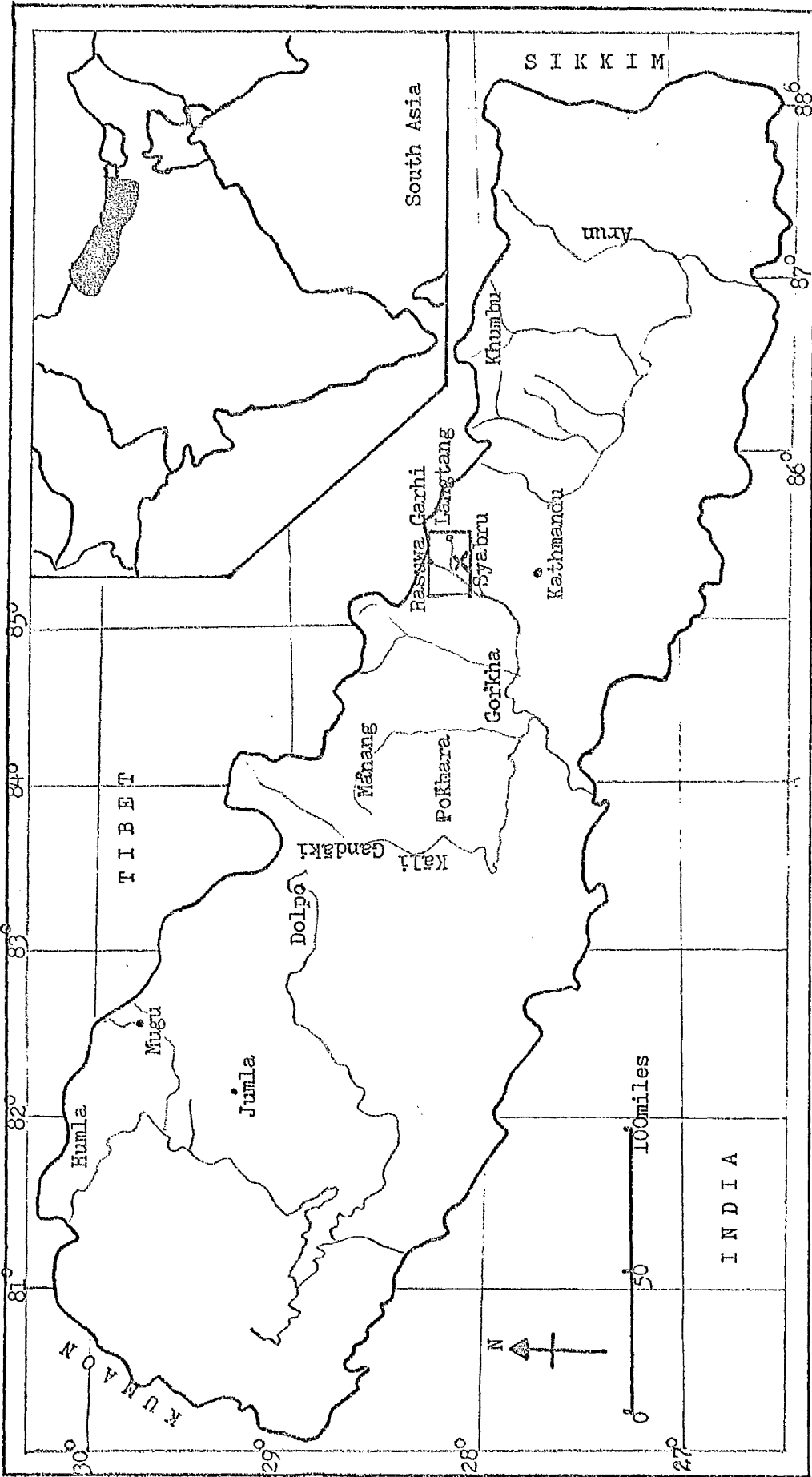
The thesis has three broad objectives which are in order of specificity:

- (i) the presentation and analysis of new ethnographic data concerning the Tamangs, the largest tribal group in Nepal;
 - (ii) the furtherance of the comparative study of Himalayan tribal societies through the examination of field data in the light of studies of related peoples, and the exploration of anthropological problems of wider significance in the Asian context;
 - (iii) the application and advancement of modern approaches to ritual.
- Each of these points will be discussed in more detail.

The Tamangs

The conquest and unification of Nepal was brought about in the late eighteenth century by the King of Gorkha, ruler of a small state in central Nepal, who overthrew the city-states of the Kathmandu Valley and expanded his control eastwards and westwards until his territorial aims came into conflict with the interests of the East India Company on the subcontinent. Gorkha rule not only brought the country under centralised political control but extended the institutions of Hindu society to the many tribal peoples who had come within the orbit of the kingdom. Chief amongst these was the caste system, in which social groups are ranked in accordance with a conception of ritual purity and separated by means of a ban on interdining and intermarriage (although the practice of caste endogamy is less rigid in Nepal than in India - see von Führer-Haimendorf, 1960 and Caplan, 1974). The tribal peoples were assigned a rank near the bottom of the hierarchy as matwāli (N) castes, or drinkers of alcohol, standing above untouchables but still regarded as inferior to higher caste Hindus. However, for those tribes living in areas remote from the capital and provincial centres, or near the Tibetan frontier where other cultural influences impinged, contacts with Hindu rule and Hinduism did not bring fundamental changes. Internal social relations were ordered according to principles quite different from those of the hierarchical caste system and alternative religious beliefs and practices held sway.

The largest of these tribes were the Tamangs, a Mongoloid Tibeto-Burman people now numbering over half a million; they live mainly in the central areas of Nepal but are also found as far east as Sikkim (see Map 1). Despite their size and extent the Tamangs have received much less anthropological attention than numerically smaller groups like the Sherpas. Early European writers tended to be rather dismissive, one of them describing the Tamangs as "hewers of wood and drawers of water, coolies by heritage and ready to merge their individuality in almost any adjacent tribe" (Landon, 1928: 246). The first serious anthropological interest was shown by von Führer-Haimendorf who published a brief paper in 1956 outlining the major features of Tamang religion and social structure on the basis of a short stay in an area to the east of Kathmandu. This study uncovered a number of interesting basic features of Tamang social organisation, such as a preference for cross-cousin marriage, although some aspects



Map 1 - Nepal

such as a division into the high status '12 clans' (bārajāt) and the low status '18 clans' (athārajāt) and the system of kipat land tenure (in which individual clans have exclusive rights over a defined area) have not been found by students working in other areas of the country inhabited by Tamangs. A decade passed before the subject was taken up again in Macdonald's (1966; 1975a) partial translation of a Tamang pseudo-history in which he brought together the work of early writers on Nepal and his own personal knowledge of the country and the people to explicate the work of the Tamang author Sri Santabir Lama.

Since that time Höfer has carried out extensive fieldwork in Dhading District between Kathmandu and Gorkha, publishing a preliminary report (1969) and some materials on Tamang shamanism (1971; 1972; 1974) (1). Frank (1974a; 1974b) has made a demographic survey of central Nepal, revealing the full extent of Tamang settlement and pinpointing Rasuwa District as a region of particular homogeneity. Bista (1972) has made a brief general survey in his work The people of Nepal and various scattered information has appeared in Borgström (1976) who was marginally concerned with a Tamang settlement in the Kathmandu Valley, Peters (1978; 1979) who has published on Tamang shamanism also in the Valley, and Toffin (1976) who studied the population - part of which is Tamang - of the upper Akhu Kholā valley as part of joint CNRS project on the area. Finally Clarke (1980a; 1980b) has recently published material on the Helambu region lying to the east of the Trisuli river.

From what is now known of the Tamangs of Nepal there appears to be considerable variation in social organisation and religious and cultural orientation. This is most strikingly revealed in the diversity of the spoken language in which speakers of 'eastern Tamang' and 'western Tamang' are mutually incomprehensible, and in which groups claiming a Tamang identity are in fact Tibetan dialect speakers such as those found in Langtang (2) and along the eastern bank of the Bhote Kholā near the Tibetan border. These Tibetan speakers do not exhibit the same forms of social organisation as their true Tibetan neighbours to the north but have much more in common, particularly in their clan system, with neighbouring Tamang speakers with whom they occasionally intermarry (3).

There is also conflicting evidence concerning the Buddhist orientation of the Tamangs and the character of the indigenous tribal religion with which it coexists. In Rasuwa District, where the focal

village of this study is situated, Buddhism of the Tibetan variety is strongly established and clearly attested to by the presence of numerous Buddhist structures and religious specialists. There is also a flourishing tradition of ecstatic religion led by the shamans (bombo) and a system - now in decline - of non-ecstatic tribal specialists. But further to the south-west in Dhading District Hüfer (1969) found Buddhism to be in a state of virtual decay. East of Kathmandu where Buddhism is also strong the ecstatic shaman is of less importance than a tribal priest (known by the Nepali term dhāmi) who acts as a mouthpiece of the spirits.

In view of these factors no study based on a restricted area can claim to be applicable to the whole tribe. Indeed, if we turn Landon's caustic comment on the lack of individuality of the Tamangs around, it raises the question of what is meant by a tribe, since a degree of linguistic and cultural homogeneity might be taken as defining criteria. There are certainly unifying features of 'Tamangness' such as a strong tendency to group endogamy, a preference for cross-cousin marriage and a system of exogamous patrilineal clans, but the general answer would seem to be that group boundaries are in part a matter of self-definition and in part definition by others. Tamangs thus find themselves sharply demarcated by religious orientation from Hindu society with its system of castes, and by social and political factors from their Tibetan neighbours, but the boundaries between themselves and other similar clan-based Buddhist groups are more fluid. One cannot but agree with Fisher's comment that "The universal practice of labelling and classifying the peoples of Nepal primarily as this or that tribe or caste needs considerable rethinking" (1978: 50), or with Allen's dictum that "in thinking about the hill peoples the attitude one tribe/one culture is a positive hindrance" (1976: 501).

The thesis opens with two chapters on the area of study and the society of the Tamangs living there which serve not only to introduce the social setting of the rituals under consideration but broaden and extend our knowledge of the range of variation within the Tamang tribe.

Himalayan tribal peoples

If it appears increasingly unlikely that a homogeneous Tamang culture exists, then the study of one particular variant is by no means an exercise in 'butterfly collecting'. Precisely because there is no

simple one tribe/one culture demarcation the variations become interesting not only in themselves but for the light they throw on the interrelationship of the whole range of populations living along the northern borders of Nepal and extending into Sikkim. These societies, despite a number of important differences, can be seen as representing variations on the theme of Tibetan culture and religion. Sometimes, as with the Sherpas and Tamangs living in these areas, they go so far as to claim their origins were in Tibet and often they retain features of Tibetan material culture the salience of which is maintained through trading trips and pilgrimages there and through intermingling with Tibetan refugees who have crossed the border in the wake of the Chinese takeover.

The general religious system of these tribal peoples has been influenced by their Tibetan links and in some respects shows a common form - that is, a literate Tibetan Buddhist tradition under the control of a special priesthood known as lamas (Tib. bla-ma) in tandem with an oral, often ecstatic, shamanic or tribal religion. Usually there is also some degree of Hindu influence, particularly in the celebration of Nepali national festivals. The directions in which this system has developed have been touched on by various ethnographers; in each case local historical and social factors have led to a distinctive formation.

Thus the Sherpas appear to be the most thoroughly entrenched in Tibetan Buddhism, to the extent of having developed their own monastic system somewhat on Tibetan lines (von Füller-Haimendorf, 1964). Hinduism has had practically no effect on the Sherpas, while shamanism has declined until it is of negligible importance, with many Sherpa shamans retired and those laymen still requiring this form of aid turning to Nepali healers (Paul, 1976). At the other extreme are groups in the west of Nepal like the Kham Magars who seem to have been very little influenced by Buddhism but who have a remarkably full and luxuriant shamanic tradition on central Asiatic lines (Watters, 1975). Amongst the Gurungs there is a complex blend with, according to their ethnographers, four types of specialist representing different belief systems: the Buddhist lamas who seem to be few in number and rarely employed except for funerals; the Hindu brahmins who are only able to find occasional employment in casting horoscopes etc; and two non-ecstatic varieties of tribal priest, the pa'ju and khepre who direct the main part of Gurung religious life (Pignède, 1966; Messerschmidt,

1976a). To the east in Sikkim live the Lepchas who maintain a dual system of Tibetan Buddhism and what has been called the Mun religion after its associated specialists. The contrast is again one between a literate organised priesthood and a loose grouping of ritual specialists who often employ a state of ecstasy to conduct apotropaic rituals, a system described by its ethnographer as two religions which are "mutually contradictory" (Gorer, 1957: 181).

In addition to these major groups there are many small so-called Bhote or Tibetan speaking groups scattered across the Nepalese Himalayas who are more or less influenced by Tibetan Buddhism while retaining tribal or shamanic traditions; the Lhomis of the upper Arun valley where Buddhism is now on the wane (von Föhrer-Haimendorf, 1975); the people of the Manang valley where Buddhism of the Kargyud-pa sect is still strong (Gurung, 1976); the Thakalis who are in the process of suppressing once strong Buddhist ties in a bid to gain acceptance in the wider community by moving towards Hinduism (von Föhrer-Haimendorf, 1966); the people of Dolpo where the Bon religion of Tibet (in modern form) is found side-by-side with more orthodox Buddhism (Jest, 1975); the areas of Mugu and Humla in the far north-west of Nepal and which are also Buddhist, and the migratory Byanshi people of Darchula whose religion is described as "Tibetan Buddhism, hill animism and Hinduism in a very complex pattern" (Manzardo, Dahal & Rai, 1976).

The issue of the coexistence of Buddhism and a variety of animistic and shamanistic cults reaches beyond the immediate tribal situation to Tibet itself, which has seen as a matter of historical record the displacement - not without a struggle - of the early Bon religion (4) by Buddhism from the seventh century AD onwards. The shamanic or folk aspect of Tibetan religion has been heavily overshadowed by a concern on the part of researchers with Buddhism, to the extent that this is seen as virtually synonymous with Tibetan religion (but for notable exceptions see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975 and Berglie, 1976). Where the dual nature of Tibetan religion has been acknowledged it is almost invariably in terms of two traditions, so preserving the historical disjunction between Buddhism and its forerunner without indicating how they are now interrelated. Thus one writer notes,

"Tibetan religion provides an almost classic example of the coexistence and interfusion of two traditions; a 'high' tradition of Buddhist ethics and metaphysics, meditation and ritual, and

a 'low' tradition consisting of beliefs and practices of an essentially non-Buddhist kind....."

but then goes on immediately to deny the validity of the distinction;

".....in Tibet the two traditions were not distinguished, their amalgamation being designated by the single word chos, 'religion'"

(Kvaerne, 1975: iv).

For the historian of religion this presents a fascinating problem: how have the two traditions become fused, which elements in Buddhism can be identified as foreign accretions, and how have symbols changed their meaning over time? But even for Tibet the historical record is fragmentary and inevitably massively biased towards the 'victorious' tradition, Buddhism, which tends to distort what can be pieced together concerning its predecessor; nor can the present interrelationship be taken as a reliable indication of what the distant past may have been like. And in the case of the tribal societies of Nepal the attempt to identify and chart the development of two traditions is even more misleading, for in Nepal there is often no historical record at all. The most that can be said is that, at a reasonable guess, the tribes presumably always had some sort of indigenous religion which may or may not correspond in some way to the present animist complex, and that at some point Tibetan missionising activity perhaps coupled with the peoples' own desires for prestige or closer links with important trading partners led them to adopt Buddhism. But to push the historical linkage any further is often a meaningless exercise. Thus it is difficult to know what to understand by such statements as:

"Both Gurung shamanic traditions incorporate elements of pre-Buddhist Bon religion which is still prevalent in remote Himalayan regions" (Messerschmidt, 1976b: 200).

Does it mean there is a close link with the present-day lamaistic style of Bon which is still to be found? Or with Bon as it is presumed to have existed before the coming of Buddhism? But then, how could a pre-Buddhist religion still be prevalent after a period of many centuries during which it has been in continuous dynamic relationship with Buddhism? The writer's problem is that he is trying to connect two incompatible ideas - a present-day dynamic system of shamanism and a static partial record of a system presumed to have existed twelve centuries ago (5).

The problem with the notion of two traditions or two religions, now well-recognised, is that it turns out to be effectively ahistorical; it obscures both the undoubted changes which have come about over time in the folk system as a direct result of the impact of Buddhism or for other reasons and the long-term changes within Buddhism itself as a result of interaction with the folk system and through doctrinal, political and social changes. Moreover, it seems unsatisfactory to begin from a position which, as Kvaerne points out, means nothing to the people in question.

These points relate to a much wider debate in the anthropology of South and Southeast Asia where in many places there is a similar conjunction of Buddhism (or Hinduism) with a folk religion. The literature on this debate is too great to be reviewed here, but a number of objections, including those above, have been raised against the great tradition/little tradition or Sanskritic/popular dichotomies. Recasting the approach in a functionalist form which distinguishes a number of different systems - normative, non-normative, apotropaic Buddhism and then another folk religion (Spiro, 1971) does not escape these problems but only adds new ones: the reification of systems which have no correspondence in the thought of their adherents, a questionable theory of religion and a stress on ideas to the detriment of the study of ritual.

To my mind the most satisfactory responses to this problem have sought the relationship between the various components of a religious system in their structural linkages. Thus Evers, in dealing with the three contrasting value systems of Sinhalese society - Theravada Buddhism, the worship of gods and placating of demons, and allegiance to the divine king, distinguishes the principles of parallelism and opposition and their dynamics of competition and hierarchisation (Evers, 1972: 102). Tambiah, writing on Buddhism and the spirit cults of Northeast Thailand, suggests that the totality of a religious system "is necessarily arranged in terms of oppositions, complementarities, dialectical tensions and hierarchical positions" (Tambiah, 1970: 96). From a slightly different, but useful, point of view Babb (1975) points to differences in ritual dialects or modes of expression which are differentiated in terms of prestige, style and context.

It is these examples which serve as models for the present discussion which can also be seen as addressing problems applicable to a wide range of societies extending far beyond the immediate Himalayan setting.

Religion and the study of ritual

Setting aside for the moment the question of the interrelationship between different religious complexes, I will go on to consider in more general terms how the study of ritual may be approached. Various lines of thought have been proposed but except in a broad sense there is no single accepted model. Approaches which work well for, say, African initiation ceremonies do not necessarily carry over successfully to historically based, literate religions found in those 'lukewarm' societies which fall somewhere between modern developed 'hot' societies and traditional tribal 'cold' societies (cf Sahlins, 1976: 211). The theoretical basis and analytic methods employed should be appropriate to the material under consideration. In this section I will outline briefly the approach taken here and review some of the alternatives.

A problem of central concern to the anthropological study of religion is the relationship between ^{the} literal instrumental level at which people perform their rituals and evidently expect something from them, and a second 'moral' level at which they are sometimes said 'really' to operate. This in turn connects with differing views of the stress which should be given to the pragmatic and the symbolic aspects of ritual and beyond that with the question of in what sense ritual can be said to be rational or effective (see for example Jarvie & Agassi, 1974 and Beattie, 1974 for contrasting attitudes). My intention here is not so much to reopen this debate as to indicate which of the lines of thought which it has thrown up appear to me useful and appropriate for understanding Tamang religion.

Interestingly, Tibetan Buddhist doctrine prefigures the argument to a certain extent in that Buddhism teaches a twofold truth: that the gods and demons of the pantheon have no objective reality in terms of ultimate truth which is the preserve of the fully enlightened one. They, like all other understandings of the everyday world, are mere appearances which grow out of the false dualities created by human perception and cognition. The enlightened are those who have realised that ultimate truth is immanent in all appearances, and so are no longer deluded as to the

true nature of existence. Nevertheless the illusions of the unenlightened mind still produce real effects, just as a dream may create real feelings of fear or panic. Hence ritual can be efficacious in a literal sense by dealing with the causes of illness and disaster but its true justification lies in directing the mind towards ultimate truth.

At this point we must examine more closely the terms 'technical', 'instrumental' and 'expressive'. Clearly from the standpoint of Tibetan doctrine - and also I suggest from the actuality of Tamang religious practice, whether Buddhist or not - we can accept the dictum that "each ritual has its own teleology" (Turner, 1967: 32). They have expressly stated purposes and goals and methods of achieving these which are not for the actors in any sense "symbolic statements about the social order" (Leach, 1954: 14), nor are they overtly performed in order to create "a set of mental and moral dispositions" (Lienhardt, 1961: 283). In all the examples which I shall discuss the actors explicitly see their actions as having specific intentions with regard to a variety of non-human agencies. They say they do such and such a rite to expel malignant demons, or to protect the harvest, or to replenish their stock of good fortune, or for some vaguer reason such as making merit or pleasing the gods. They are sometimes sceptical as to whether the hoped-for results are achieved, but that is a separate problem. The starting point therefore must be the description of the rituals and their stated purposes. From there one can go on to examine how these are supposedly and actually achieved.

The teleological or instrumental character of ritual presupposes a certain world-view; that is, the ritual refers beyond itself to various conceptions about the world and the forces which underpin it - gods who can influence the harvest or the weather, demons who can cause the symptoms of illness, high deities concerned for the soul of the worshipper, and so on. There may be more or less developed systems of ideas about illness, or the soul, or the afterlife. There necessarily is such a belief-system or collection of ideas although that does not imply that everybody in the society holds them or holds them equally firmly. Commitment is an empirical question. Postulating the existence of a belief-system does not involve any particular psychological assumptions beyond indicating as a minimum

the suspension of disbelief; as participants in the cultural and social system people will tend to go along with the formulas legitimated by tradition - and reinforced by the ritual performances - even if they understand them only imperfectly or are little interested in explaining them (cf Worsley, 1970). Lastly, the extent to which religious conceptions are systematic is a matter for determination in each case. Some societies place great stress on the elaboration of ideas, others seem less interested and use them indifferently according to particular contexts.

How does this instrumental aspect of ritual connect with the distinction often made between technical actions and ritual actions? Radcliffe-Brown excluded instrumentality altogether in his definition:

"ritual acts differ from technical acts in having in all instances some expressive or symbolic element in them" (Radcliffe-Brown, 1969: 143)

He thus discounts as unimportant the commonsensical notion that they are technical in some sense for those who perform them and follows Durkheim's view that the claimed efficacy of the rites is imaginary. More recently Goody frankly recognises that the distinction derives from "our own 'rationalistic' frame of reference" (1962: 172) but regards it as necessary nonetheless in order to apply a single sociological view to all custom, ie those actions in which the relationship between the means and the end is not 'intrinsic'. But, as Skorupski (1976) has pointed out, this whole approach is based on a false logical distinction, since 'technical' and 'expressive' are not terms relating to the same area of discourse at all and so cannot be opposed. More generally Worsley presses the attack by pointing out that not only does the distinction usually find no parallel in native thought which does not divide up existence in this way, but that in any case it is impossible to identify any action as 'purely' technical and divorced from social and symbolic meanings (op. cit.: 304). More recent writers such as Sahlins make the same point in seeking to undermine the utilitarian argument that things are done for purely rational - rather than for meaningful - reasons (ibid: 91).

The idea that religious ritual is expressive has nevertheless been pervasive. To the question, what does it express, Durkheim gave the answer: society.

"Before all, it is a system of ideas with which individuals represent to themselves the society of which they are members,

and the obscure but intimate relations they have with it" (1968: 305).

The meaning of ritual could thus be seen to lie in the symbolic expression of various aspects of social organisation. Here one moves into the territory of Turner's 'dominant symbol' which "brings the ethical and jural norms of society into close contact with strong emotional stimuli" (*op cit*: 30), or Geertz's 'model of' aspect of the symbol, the vehicle for the conception of the world and the self (Geertz, 1966). Some very convincing analyses have been made using this framework, which seems to work particularly well for a society like the Ndembu which lays tremendous stress on initiation and life-crisis ceremonies which are clearly concerned with reiterating features of social structure and instituting changes in roles. Thus in Mukanda, a boys' circumcision ritual, the symbols can be clearly seen as representing the removal of the boy from the clutches of women and delivering him into the male community of hunters (Turner, *op cit*: 51).

However, amongst Tibetan Buddhist societies, including the Tamangs, although there may be a certain amount of ceremonial connected with events such as birth, puberty, marriage and divorce and the achievement of new formal roles (headman, priest etc) there is a striking lack of religious concern with such events. All pass with no more than the giving of a religious blessing or protective charm; it is only in the death rituals that one finds the involvement of the religious enterprise in the reordering of social relationships (although my analysis will suggest that healing rituals can be likened to such rites of passage in that they seek to repair disorders of social structure). Hence to transplant the theory that ritual is concerned with the symbolic expression of social organisation wholesale to a major religion embracing a diversity of rituals with a largely standard doctrinal form, having great historical depth and theoretical elaboration, and covering a variety of different societies, can be very misleading.

Thus, for example, Ortner regards Buddhist rituals in Sherpa society as beginning with some cultural problem such as "conflicts and contradictions in social experience and cultural meaning" (1978: 3) and moving towards a solution which embodies a particular cultural orientation. But it is a long step from saying that rituals represent and act upon reality as given in the religiously defined framework to saying that they "attempt to render intelligible the immediate problems of social structure, economic structure, kinship, ecology and the like" (*ibid*: 8) by restructuring the actor's experience.

Problems of existential meaning, suffering and death which may be defined by a particular religious orientation are far different from "problems of social structure" etc.

Such an approach begs some very large questions and leaves others unanswered. For instance, the relationship between the manifest level of the ritual's stated purpose - its teleology - and the symbolic-expressive level of the analysis remains completely mysterious. It cannot be that the performers are totally unaware of this latter significance, otherwise the symbols could not be said to have the inferred meaning for them in any sense. Thus if they say they are conducting a ritual to expel malevolent demons but according to Ortner are really concerned with "inequalities in the economic and political structure" (ibid: 3) they must be unconsciously (or even consciously) aware of this other level. But if that is the case, why should they need to express these cultural problems in ritual or symbolic form? What would be the point of having both manifest and symbolic levels of meaning and what is the connection between these two levels (cf Skorupski, op cit: 39)?

The second problem is that it is nowhere made clear what the relationship is between the rituals as performed in Sherpa society and as performed in many other Tibetan Buddhist societies. As the ritual's symbolic form is relatively invariant - it is textually prescribed - does this mean that these other societies suffer the same 'cultural problems' and seek similar solutions, even though there may be wide differences in their 'social structure, economic structure' etc? Or is there in fact no linkage at all between the ritual form and the participants' symbolic understanding of it - they read in whatever meanings suit them and their particular circumstances?

This is an extreme example but does illustrate some of the problems inherent in the view that ritual symbolically expresses the social order. Indeed one of these problems lies in the use of the term 'express' which, as Mary Douglas suggests, tends to reify one aspect of symbolism and "create(s) a puzzle as to what it expresses" which parallels a more general predilection for "splitting behaviour into levels of more or less symbolic values" (Douglas, 1978: 118).

By abandoning the false dichotomy of technical/expressive the way is cleared for an alternative approach which preserves the important

insight that religion does indeed have some intimate connection with society and that ritual is concerned with communication, without committing it to the assertion that in a direct way it is communicating about society or about 'cultural problems'. In this alternative view the relationship between religion and society is differently conceived. Rather than ritual symbolically expressing the social order it is the social order which serves as a model for the ritual. Thus different ways of interacting through ritual may be seen as deriving from modes of human interaction (Horton, 1960), and conceptions about the supernatural may be modelled on social relationships. Interest is focussed on schemes of symbolic classification and how they relate to features of social organisation, and ritual can be seen as achieving its results by 'saying something', communicating between men and the unseen inhabitants of the supernatural sphere, opening the way for an examination of the strategies which are used and of the channels of communication, such as ritual's processual form (Turner, op. cit.), the magical power of words (Tambiah, 1968) and the vehicles of singing, music and dancing (Bloch, 1974). Strategies which become of interest may include the coercive use of words as in the 'performative utterance' or 'operative ceremony' in which doing something is achieved by saying it, and the role of the gift in religious ceremonies; for example, Parkin's distinction between negotiable and altruistic ideologies, corresponding roughly to exchanges based on exploitation or self-interest, and those based on the notion of the 'pure gift' (Parkin, 1976); even the altruistic ideology may turn out to have elements of self-interest for, as Parkin notes, "the unquestioned ideal of altruism may act as an unintended cover for the development of utilitarian interests between donor and receiver" (ibid: 172) - a view which can be equally applicable when the receiver is a deity.

Some of these insights are employed below in, for example Chapter 4 where I examine the way in which traditional and present political structures in relation to land rights are paralleled in the cult of the territorial deities; in Chapter 5 where the magical efficacy of many curing rites is seen as being based on the symbolic or mimetic enactment of the desired events in which the symbolic form is related to the social transformations of a rite of passage, an idea which appears again in the treatment of funeral ceremonies (Chapter 8); and in the offering ceremonies described in Chapter 6 in which the transfer of divine grace is closely connected with the giving of gifts to the gods.

The advantages of this approach are several. It no longer devalues the literal instrumental aspect of ritual but encourages interest in how it works and what ideas lie behind the performance. It makes it possible to reopen the question of the efficacy of ritual without having to make quasi-psychological assumptions about its effects on the hearts and minds of the participants. It permits the analysis to go beyond the actors' own interpretations without introducing a mysterious unconscious linkage between the instrumental and symbolic levels, for one can interpret the religious forms as ideology if they are indeed social models expressed in terms of divine beings or 'natural' events; the actors' false consciousness may in fact mean that they are unaware of this ideology, without in any way affecting the rationale of the performance.

However, in some ways this approach does not go far enough for religious ideas are themselves socially constituted conceptions about reality with the capacity to assume an objectivity of their own. As such they may come to impose their own logic of structure and process on ritual performances which can no longer be seen purely in terms of social transformations, operative ceremonies or negotiating strategies. The rituals are part of a meaningful cultural order in which the supposedly instrumental ends which are sought are already symbolically constituted and hence derive their logic as part of a more general scheme of symbolic classification. In this sense ritual is more concerned with creating and recreating the cultural order itself than with instrumental attempts to change the world to fit human needs or to change people to fit them for new social roles. And to the extent that religion is the locus or embodiment of dominant cultural values, as it is in Tamang society, those values will tend to spill over into most other areas of life so that, for example, aspects of production will have not merely rational-economic motives but be conceived in terms of giving greater status to a man who can afford to give more to religion; status-ranking itself is religiously defined with priests standing above laymen and rich laymen who can give more to religion above poor laymen. This meaningful order constituted in terms of religiously given evaluations affects not just social organisation but experience too. Thus abstract ideas such as the doctrine of karma may, when seen from the actors' point of view, be regarded as a theodicy, a cultural resolution of the problem of suffering, but from the standpoint of the symbolic order the general range of conditions which count as 'suffering' has already been predefined. The doctrine is not just an explanatory mechanism but part of a wider symbolic order which defines the problems to which it then offers resolutions.

Presentation of ethnography

The presentation of the ethnography of Tamang religion and society offers a number of problems. I will briefly examine these here and outline the framework which has been used for the following chapters.

I have already commented on the sort of approach which seeks to isolate a number of religious 'systems' on historical or psychological grounds and then apportion bits of religious belief and behaviour to each one. The importance of ritual will tend to be downplayed and greater concern shown with pointing up continuities, inconsistencies and variations between the different systems and between the levels of doctrinal theory and religious practice, while religious practices which fall outside the mainstream will tend to be separated out in the account - even though they may not be distinguished in the society itself - and explained in terms of a historical survival or an essentially non-religious utilitarian method of coping with practical problems.

An alternative approach would be to focus on each of the main religious specialists in turn and look at the rituals associated with each and their underlying ideas. The religious specialist would be seen as pivotal, the mediator between the ritual needs of the community and the religious ideas or beliefs in terms of which these are fulfilled. Such an approach would work well if in fact it had proved possible in the Tamang case to demonstrate a clear distinction between the rituals and cosmologies associated with each type of specialist. For example, using Mandelbaum's terms, one group of specialists and their rituals might be assigned to a 'pragmatic' complex, associated with healing and renewal, and another to a 'transcendental' complex more concerned with other-worldly issues of the afterlife and salvation (Mandelbaum, 1966). But the data collected clearly showed a substantial area of overlap between different types of specialists; both major types on occasions conduct 'pragmatic' rituals but in terms of contrasting symbols and ideologies, and both are concerned with rituals that go beyond the merely pragmatic.

Another contrast has been drawn between individual and collective rituals - those connected with particular cases and those directed mainly at the welfare of the community as a whole. The difficulty with this method is that it obscures the way in which individual and collective rituals associated with one variety of specialists are linked

in terms of symbols and methodology but contrasted with the individual and collective rites of another set of specialists.

Each of these approaches, while having the advantage of a neat and clear presentation of the facts, will end by obscuring as much as they reveal of the reality of Tamang practice and thought.

Another method presents itself and this, rather than beginning by imposing external categories ill-suited to the data, starts with the emic system of classification, or way in which the people themselves think of their rituals. In the Tamang case this reveals three major ritual groupings which refer not to religious systems or specialists or social groupings but to the mode of ritual action; in other words the sort of approach which is made to the supernatural. The first type of ritual approach is known as sül-pa meaning 'supplication' (6); this implies a restrained distanced form of prayer or request used especially in the context of rites concerned with the protection of the household and the village. The second type is klä-pa - 'throwing away', getting rid of demons and evil spirits; these rituals with a variety of individual names take the form of violent coercive rites of expulsion involving real or symbolic sacrifice and the destruction of enemies both human and supernatural. The third type is che-pa - literally 'offering' or worship; offerings of various types play a part in virtually all Tamang rituals but the term che-pa is typically applied to the principal Buddhist ceremonies involving the whole community on a regular basis.

These three types encompass most of the major Tamang rituals although other subsidiary types will also be noted, including jal-pa or 'homage', the paying of respects to a deity; kor-pa or circumambulation, the circumscription of a site of divine power; and tsi or divination which is the precursor to many of the foregoing types of ritual action.

It would be difficult to use the emic classification just as it stands both because of the considerable overlap between types - most rituals involve offering and divination and Buddhist offering rituals incorporate an element of expulsion - and because the system of classification is itself in the nature of an ideology in which practice does not always conform with the stated typology. Thus what is actually done under the heading of supplication may turn out to be as coercive and violent as any expulsion; what is described as an offering may be concerned less with worship than with the manipulation of divine

power and its appropriation for worldly ends. Nevertheless the emic classification points us in the direction of some of the major concerns of Tamang ritual practice - protection, exorcism and offering - which can be used as the basis for a more wide-ranging enquiry that not only describes the söl-pa, kla-pa and che-pa/^{rites} but explores how they in fact operate and points up the disparity between their ideology and praxis. In addition these categories provide the opportunity to examine the ideas associated with each of the ritual complexes. The supplicatory rituals refer primarily to a set of territorial deities and thus require an account of the religious ordering of space and its relation to the political divisions of power over territory; exorcistic rituals will be introduced by an account of Tamang ideas on the mystical causation of disease and misfortune; offering rituals require some discussion of eschatological and cosmological beliefs.

Chapters 2 and 3 introduce the people and the area - the geography, climate, ecology, demography and what little can be pieced together of the history. This information is then re-examined through the eyes of the Tamangs - their myths of arrival, the symbolic ordering of time and space, the relationship between the agricultural and the religious calendar, and the influence of religious values on production. Chapter 3 provides a brief overview of the salient features of Tamang social organisation - the clan, the lineage and the household. Kinship, marriage and the domestic cycle are examined and various festivals, often derived from Hinduism, which are particularly important in terms of reiterating ties of kinship and affinity are described. Chapter 3 concludes with an account of features important in bringing change to the area, including administrative reform, education and improved communications.

Chapter 4 opens the discussion of ritual and, using the setting of the söl-pa protective rites, introduces many of the most important themes running throughout Tamang religious life including the religious symbolism, the pantheon of deities and their hierarchical ordering. The protective rites performed by the householder and the Buddhist lama are compared and contrasted and their essentially different procedures uncovered.

Chapter 5 then takes up the differing procedures of the lama and the shaman in the attempt to control sickness and misfortune, while

Chapter 6 concentrates on the description and analysis of two important temple ceremonies which exemplify the che-pa style of ritual.

Chapter 7 shifts the focus from rituals to the specialists who conduct them, exploring the training, powers, social standing and role structure of each, and goes on to suggest a structural model of their relationship to one another. Chapter 8 explores the cycle of death rituals, the most important of all in Tamang religious life. These involve the participation of both principal types of specialist - lamas and shamans - and bring together the three main categories of supplication, exorcism and offering. Having dissected the various parts of religious practice and theory the Conclusion (Chapter 9) brings them together again and shows how they are interrelated.

Notes to Chapter 1

(1) This study was completed before the publication of Höfer's Tamang ritual texts I (1981). I should like to anticipate the discussion in later chapters by commenting briefly on this important work which, through a detailed examination of 'texts' (which in fact are ritual chants), gives an added dimension to our understanding of what the author terms the folk religion of the Tamangs. Generally Höfer agrees that the Tamangs belong to a proto Gurung-Thakali-Tamang group originating in Tibet who probably occupied the Trisuli/Ākhu Kholā area in the first decades of the eighteenth century, ousting the Ghaes who previously ruled there. He goes on to describe the non-Buddhist pantheon in some detail, suggesting that four important categories are composed of the la (gods), mān, (ghosts), lu (nāgas) and syimo (undeparted dead) - here referred to as lha, māng, lū and shin-de. To these he adds two more, the bir and masān derived from the Hindu folk pantheon, which so far as I was aware do not figure in the pantheon in the upper Bhote Kholā valley. He also notes the presence of five major religious specialists; besides the lama, bombo and lambu (tribal priest - here lha-bōn) there are the mukhiyā (celebrant of the village god) and the pujari, an expert in rituals addressed to Hindu divinities. Neither of these last two were present in my fieldwork area. In general the most striking difference between the area of Dhading District where Höfer's study is set and the upper Bhote Kholā is the decline of Buddhism in the former while it remains a powerful force in the latter. In the Dhading area lamas are almost entirely concerned with the death ceremonies, while healing, exorcisms and the ceremonies of the territorial deities have been taken over by other specialists. As the following chapters will show, this is far from being the case around Syabru.

(2) The conventional spelling - properly it is (Tib.) glang-thang - 'land/plain of the ox'.

(3) See Hall (1978) on the Tibetan speakers of Langtang. Frank (n.d.) on the basis of a more thorough survey than I was able to make reaches the conclusion that they are in fact Sherpas. To my mind this view does not give sufficient weight to the facts that they do not speak Sherpa and that half the clans found in Langtang are identical to or closely associated with the clans of the neighbouring Tamangs, both groups having the same marriage system which is unlike

Notes cont.

that of the Sherpas of Khumbu. The disjunction between ethnic label, spoken language and social organisation is beginning to emerge as a common feature of this region. Thus Clarke (1980a) notes of the neighbouring Helambu people that while they call themselves Sherpas they are mostly Tamangs speaking Kāgate and are only distantly related to the Sherpas of Khumbu. Again their marriage system and clan structure appear to have more in common with the Tamangs of the upper Trisuli than with the Sherpas of Khumbu (see Goldstein, 1975). All these groups appear to have originated in Tibet but then to have diverged rather rapidly in linguistic terms and to have adopted a variety of ethnic labels.

(4) A number of ideas tend to be conflated in the term Bon which ought properly to be distinguished. Firstly there is the ancient but nameless shamanism presumed to have existed always in Tibet and to have been linked with the classical central Asian shamanic complex. Then there is the more formalised but still pre-literate religion of Bon as it existed up to the time of the Buddhist conversion of Tibet. Finally there is the present day version called Bon, a religion so influenced by and intertwined with the dogma and symbols of Buddhism as to be more like an aberrant sect of the latter than a separate religion. In the 'two traditions' argument which follows it is the first or second meaning which is intended by the term Bon, not the third.

(5) To be fair, both this author and others do recognise the complexities of the problem. See his note 5, page 214 (op cit), or Paul (op cit) for an illuminating account of the structural relationship between lamaism and shamanism in a Sherpa setting.

(6) The terms used are all verbs usually associated with the nouns 'lha' (god), 'māng' (ghost) etc but they are more conveniently translated here by nouns.

CHAPTER TWO

A TAMANG VILLAGE AND ITS SETTING

This chapter focuses on a particular Tamang village and its surroundings near the northern borders of Nepal and introduces the major features of environment, population and economy which form a constant backdrop to the religious and social life of the people living there. The environment is a harsh one, typical of a mountainous region and characterised by difficult terrain, limited availability of land for cultivation and a changeable climate varying between winter snows and summer monsoon. Such a world imposes certain limitations on the possibilities for settlement and for gaining a livelihood. Yet it is important to stress that these are limits rather than determining factors. Tamang life has its own distinctive features and rhythm which result from the interaction between culture and environment: certain possibilities in their surroundings are exploited to the full, while others are left largely untapped. This may be because of religious scruples, limitations imposed by aspects of social organisation (for example, a pattern of inheritance which leads to the scattering of land and resources), or simply for the traditional reason that something has always been done a certain way and people see no reason to change it now for the sake of the uncertain advantages of some new method.

Moreover, the environment is not simply conceived of as an inert 'resource' waiting to be exploited, for it plays a major part in Tamang thought. By the time the young Tamang reaches adulthood he or she is familiar with the intricate system of names given to every part of the landscape for miles around. More than this, every field calls to mind the history of its ownership, virtually every prominent rock, tree or spring features in some legend or is associated with a territorial god or malevolent demon who must be avoided or propitiated. The constant impression on the minds of the young of the dangers of rock slides, avalanches and attacks by wild animals, not to mention the presence of a myriad other lurking beings which are thought to inhabit the hillsides, has instilled a certain attitude of mind in the people and become associated with an elaborate system of ritual action designed to ensure the stability and harmony of an existence which is seen as (and often is) precarious.

The chapter thus moves forward on two fronts. Having placed the village in its geographical and historical context, I first examine the settlement pattern and population distribution, the agricultural cycle and the range of other economic activities performed by villagers. These features are then re-examined through Tamang eyes to give a sense of their world as they see it - the legends of arrival and occupation which for them have given rise to the distinctive residential pattern, the symbolic ordering of space and the religious 'grid' which overlays the natural topography, the cycle of religious festivals and its relationship to the agricultural calendar. These ideas of space and time form an essential background to the discussion in later chapters of the various forms of religious activity.

Himalayan trails

North from Kathmandu run the two ancient trans-Himalayan trade routes which connect Tibet to the Kathmandu Valley and ultimately to the plains of India, following the river valleys which cut a transverse slice through the east-west grain of the Himalayan range and its foothills. Control of the profitable trade which used to flow along these rough tracks was one of the principal objectives of Gorkha, the small principality to the west of Kathmandu which was ultimately to bring about the unification of Nepal in the 18th century.

In modern times the more westerly of the two routes, which runs by way of the frontier post at Rasuwa Garhi to Kyirong (1) in Tibet, has been completely eclipsed by the construction of a motor road on the eastern route via Kodari and the Kuti pass, but it seems that its importance had been in decline long before that happened. Already by 1949 Tilman, the first westerner to travel that way, was disappointed by the dullness and monotony of the trail which boasted none of the colourful salt caravans and bands of pilgrims that were to be seen along the Kāli Gandāki (Tilman, 1952). Today, with the complete disappearance of long distance trade via Rasuwa Garhi to Kyirong, the character of the trail has changed still more. Now its principal travellers are minor government officials on their way to take up posts in the remote offices of the district capital or returning on leave to Kathmandu; porters struggling under the loads of building materials, office equipment and other paraphernalia required by a growing bureaucracy; groups of Tamang villagers coming down to the bazaars to sell medicinal herbs and returning with bales of cloth and baskets of rice; travelling tailors and blacksmiths with the tools

of their trade on their backs; and, in ever increasing numbers, parties of western tourists.

Coming from Kathmandu the first section of the Kyirong route is now a single-track motor road which winds its way for 45 miles over the 8,000 feet hills which surround the Kathmandu Valley and then down into the town of Trisuli Bazaar. This hot, low-lying market town, situated on the river Trisuli, is the principal point of interchange between the northern hills and the capital, receiving the produce of its rural hinterland and sending out into the hills the manufactured goods of Kathmandu and the Indian cities. From here a jeepable track continues another 5 miles to Betrawati, past the strange watery landscape of the Trisuli Hydro-Electric Project which supplies Kathmandu with most of its electrical power (although none is distributed to the northern hills). Then the trail begins to climb through broad irrigated paddy fields past Brahmin-Chetri villages.

After some hours' walk the trail rises abruptly to the village of Ramche (6,000 feet) where one enters a different world in terms of geography, ecology and culture. The comparatively low hills, smoothed and rounded by erosion, give way to steep-sided mountains plunging from heights of 15,000 feet and more to the river bed at 3-4,000 feet. The villages cling precariously to the slopes wherever they can, the fields are small and intricately terraced to take advantage of every available piece of land. From here on the population is almost entirely Tamang, living in hamlets and villages varying in size from 2 or 3 houses up to 70. The dwellings themselves now change from the thatched adobe cottages of the lower hills to stout mountain chalet houses with thick rock walls filled with a clay mortar and roofs of wooden shingles held down by boulders. The crops are no longer irrigated but are grown on dry fields, and the cows and water-buffalo of the lower hills give way to herds of yak and yak-cow crossbreeds. The prayer-flags fluttering from rooftops announce that the predominant religion is no longer Hinduism but the Tibetan form of Buddhism. The main language changes from the Indo-Aryan Nepali language to the Tibeto-Burman Tamang speech which is linked both with Tibetan and the language of neighbouring hill tribes such as the Gurungs and Magars.

At Ramche one also enters the territory of the recently created Langtang National Park and crosses the boundaries of the administrative district of Rasuwa. A day's march further north is the district

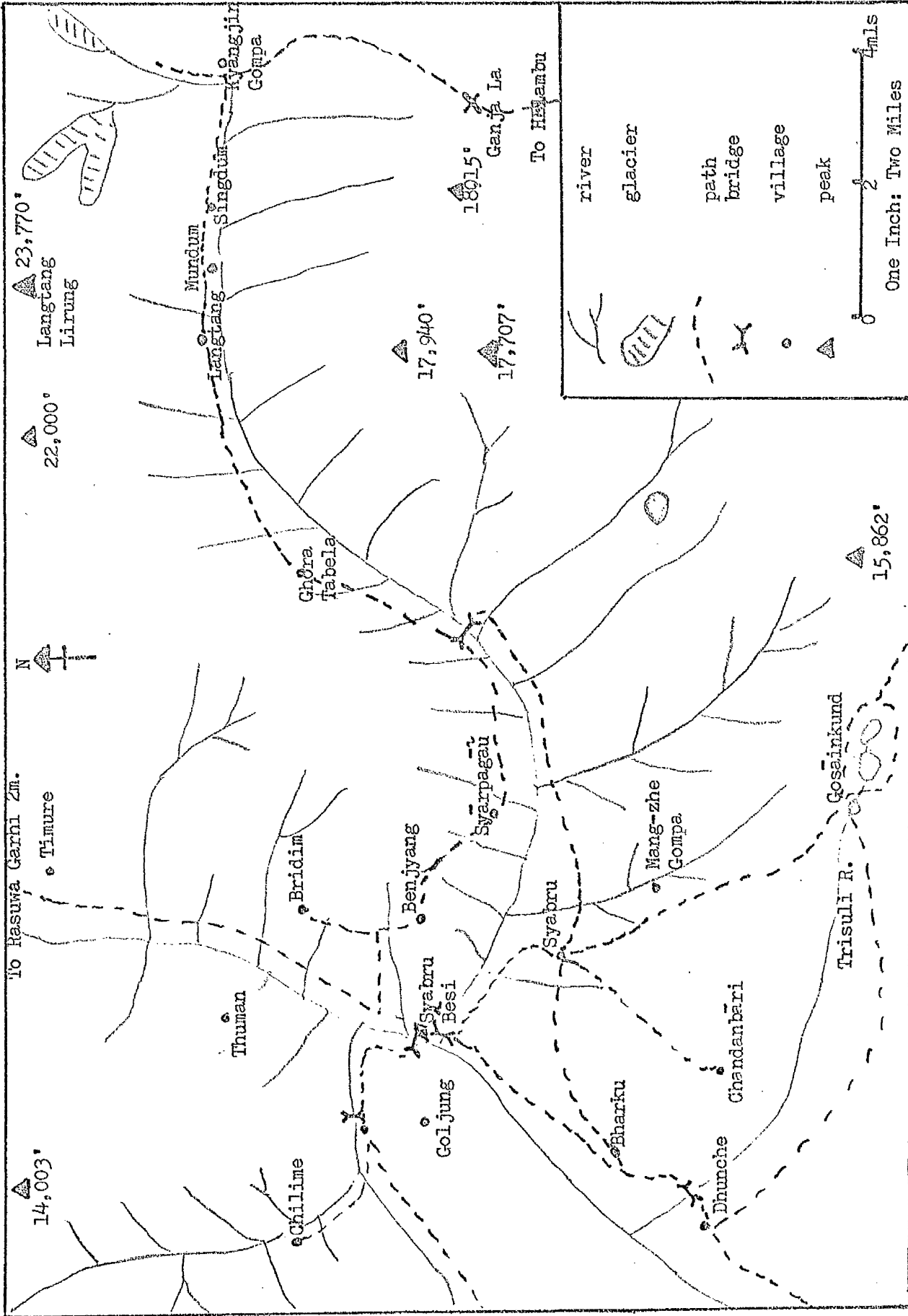
capital of Dhunche, once a medium sized village but now expanding rapidly to accommodate the many new offices of the administration and the numerous personnel drafted in to staff them. A day's walk beyond Dhunche one reaches the confluence of the main river, now known as the Bhote Kholā (Kosi on Survey of India maps), and its eastern tributary - the Langtang Kholā, which rises 22 miles away in the glacial moraine at Langsisa, at the head of the Langtang Valley. At the confluence of the two rivers lies the village known as Syabru Bēsi on the maps, but called Wangbi by all local inhabitants. Three thousand feet above the confluence on the opposite (south) side of the Langtang Kholā is the larger village of Syabru (2), sometimes known as Thulo ('big') Syabru to distinguish it from its neighbour. This village and the nearby hamlets provide the central focus for what follows.

The district - its geography, history and ethnic composition

The geographical situation of Syabru and Wangbi places them at a natural crossroads in northern Nepal and at the same time at a 'cultural junction' in Hüfer's phrase (personal communication, 1976), in the sense that this area is at the transitional point between the sphere of influence of Tibet whose borders lie only 10 miles to the north, and the furthest limits of Hindu penetration. Thus situated on the periphery of two great cultures the life of the area is a complex blend of contrasting influences. Historically sovereignty over this area has passed from one kingdom to the other, taxes being paid now to Kyirong, now to Kathmandu, and on occasion to both at once to the enormous frustration of the local people.

In addition to this primary north-south axis the Syabru area is also the focus of the tributary river systems which drain into the Bhote Kholā nearby (see Map 2). These are principally the Chilime Kholā flowing eastwards and the Langtang Kholā flowing west. The river valleys provide the more remote communities living in their upper reaches with their main access to the outside world; otherwise the only links are via difficult mountain passes which are closed by snow for all but a few summer months. Thus while movement is relatively easy all the year round on the north-south route, communications with neighbouring areas, the Ānkhu Khola to the west and Yolmo (Helambu) to the east, are restricted and of correspondingly lesser importance.

Northern Rasuwa district belongs geologically to the region known as the Inner Himalayas. The main valleys are characterised by their



Map 2 - Syabru and Langtang region

steep water-worn slopes, while the inner valleys open out into the typical U-shape of glacial valleys. Climatically the region is a transitional zone between the southern monsoon region and the arid deserts of the Tibetan plateau, rainfall being significantly less than on the southern foothills which receive the brunt of the monsoon. Most of the rainfall occurs during the period from mid-June to the end of September. The range of variation is between 1,000 mm. falling annually at the heads of the valleys to 2,000mm. at their lower ends (Hagen, 1971: 59). During the monsoon period travel is difficult because the rivers are in full spate and the bridges often destroyed, or the trails blocked by landslides. In any case this is the busiest agricultural season and people have little time for travelling. Even in the villages, however, life is uncomfortable for the paths turn to muddy streams, the houses leak and occasionally collapse when their foundations are eroded, the warm humid weather brings insects and diseases, and the work in the fields must continue whatever the weather. In October the skies clear and the humidity falls. The days are sunny and warm throughout the winter but at night the temperature drops sharply. Strong winds frequently blow up during the afternoons (as a result of the insolation or heating effect of the sun's radiation on the hills), only to die away suddenly at night. Snow is uncommon below 6,000 feet and up to 8,000 feet rarely lies long, but above 12,000 feet it may remain on the ground between November and May.

Because of this vertical climate a rotational agriculture is practised between the valley floor at 4,000 feet and the high pastures up to 14,000 feet. Like the climate the vegetation too has a vertical character, varying from semi-tropical bamboo and fern at the valley floor through evergreen forests of pine and fir from 6,000 to 7,500 feet. There is another heavily forested band of conifers and rhododendrons between 9,000 and 10,000 feet, then come the pastures and the sub-alpine forests of juniper and rhododendron up to about 12,000 feet. Beyond this there is only open moorland and scrub. Even within these general zones there can be surprisingly abrupt variations in vegetation depending on the aspect of the slope and the type of soil. The majority of cultivated land is found between 6,000 and 8,000 feet but in some high villages a summer crop is obtained up to 11,500 feet.

Few records concerning the history of the region have as yet

been uncovered and what little can be pieced together largely concerns the military campaigns of the 18th and 19th centuries.

During the 17th century AD the Malla kings of the Kathmandu Valley towns had established control over the route up to Kyirong through Syabru Bēsi in the interests of protecting their lucrative sale of ready-minted gold coinage to the Tibetan government, but it is possible that local petty rājās (kings) retained their position as subject rulers on payment of tribute to Kathmandu. By the end of the 17th century Ram Shah of Gorkha had expanded his kingdom's territories up to the Kathmandu borders at Nuwakot and the Tibetan border at Rasuwa Garhi (Regmi, 1971: 6). The days of the local chiefs were numbered and it was not long after this, according to their own reckoning of 9 generations back, that the Tamangs occupied the present site of Syabru village, which until then, they state, had been controlled by the Ghailes.

By 1748 a descendant of Ram Shah, Prithvi Narayan Shah, had gained full control over the Kyirong trade route and within another 20 years had completed the subjugation of the territory now corresponding to the state of Nepal. But in 1792 Bahadur Shah, the Regent to his successor, overreached himself in his territorial ambitions. A Gorkha expedition swept right across the Tibetan border and on as far as Shigatse, looting as they went and sacking the monastery of Tashi-lhunpo. The Chinese Resident in Lhasa (known as the Amban) had no choice but to report these depredations to his sovereign, the Emperor Ch'ien Lung, who responded swiftly to this incursion into what he considered Chinese territory. A large force was dispatched under generals Fu K'ang-an and Hai-Lan-Ch'a which retook Kyirong and then moved rapidly down the Bhote Kholā/Trisuli river, pushing the Gorkha force before them and probably creating widespread devastation as they went. According to an inscribed pillar near the Potala at Lhasa, the Chinese and Tibetan army

"traversed the mountains, so difficult to push through, as though they were moving over a level plain. They crossed rivers with great waves and narrow gorges as though they were small streams. They climbed up the peaks of the mountains and descended again in the pursuit....." (Bell, 1924; 40-45 & 275).

Outmanoeuvred by a series of flanking movements the Gorkha army fell back on Betrawati where, realising they could not possibly hold such a large well-supplied army and fearful that Kathmandu itself might be

overrun, they sued for peace. The Chinese withdrew after a treaty was signed in which Bahadur Shah agreed to acknowledge the Chinese as overlords and to send tribute every five years to the Emperor at Peking (3).

During the 19th century a number of significant developments took place in Nepal which affected the region. Following the introduction of maize in the previous century came the potato, a crop which flourished in poor soil and at higher altitudes than most grain crops, as well as producing a much higher food yield than an equivalent area planted with cereals. It is now a staple crop in Syabru. For the first time it became possible to produce a surplus of food which could be sold or bartered with one's neighbours, injecting greater wealth into the local economy (4). At the same time an increasing monetisation of the hill economies was taking place.

Land tenure during this period was almost exclusively vested in the state, the peasant cultivating it in the capacity of tenant farmer. But at the same time the state was finding that the simplest way of rewarding its servants for services rendered was by making grants of land, known as jāgir, to civil and military officials and to members of the nobility. In 1846, after a bloody confrontation, power was seized by the Kunwar lineage who three years later forced the King to confer upon the Kunwar the hereditary title of Rana. By 1856 the monarch's role was reduced to that of a figurehead. The Ranas continued the policy of land grants and at some point Syabru was assigned to a member of the Shamsher family in the form of an emolument known as khāngi. The beneficiary, or jāgirdār, derived an income from the village as a whole of Rs. 300.50, as well as having the right to dispense justice and to exact unpaid labour. In return there was an obligation to supply troops to the government and to provide transport facilities through the area (Regmi, op cit: 40ff). The revenue was collected by a local functionary who transmitted it to his superior at Nuwakot from where it was sent on to the beneficiary in Kathmandu. This system persisted until 1951 when, with the overthrow of the Ranas and the re-establishment of the monarchy, the land was brought under the raikar system of tenure, in which peasants' rights in the land are recognised by the state subject to the payment of taxes (5).

In 1854 the second Tibeto-Nepalese war broke out and the region was once again plunged into the chaos of battle and troop movements, its men pressed into service as soldiers and porters and its houses

and food requisitioned for the armies (6). The outcome for Syabru was not altogether unfavourable, however, for one of its sons, a man named Teba Kamsa Wangdi, fought in the campaign and brought home considerable booty, including two gold statues. Perhaps in atonement for the sins he committed in war he then devoted much of his wealth to founding or refurbishing a number of Buddhist temples or gumpa (Tib. dgon-pa) in and around Syabru. His memory is still revered today in the villages and his descendants live on in Syabru. Around this time the first Rana prime minister, Jang Bahadur, had built the fort which still stands at the frontier post of Rasuwa Garhi to protect himself from reprisal raids such as had occurred in 1792 and later to act as a customs post to collect revenue on the trade which after the dislocations of war was again in full swing by the end of the 19th century.

In 1951 came the re-establishment of the monarchy and the gradual opening of Nepal to the outside world. For the first time detailed anthropological work became possible and not long afterwards von Führer-Haimendorf gave the first brief account of the Tamangs (1956).

In 1961 there was a major re-organization of Nepal for administrative purposes, the country being divided into a series of 14 zones (añcāḥ) which are further sub-divided into 75 districts (jillā), each district comprising a number of administrative villages (gāṃ pañcāyat) with local elected representatives (pradhān pañcāyat) to supervise community affairs and collect taxes. Rasuwa district is in Bagmati zone and has an area of 479 square miles with a population density of 36.59 per square mile. This makes it the third smallest district in the country in terms of absolute population (after Manang and Tibrikot), and the seventh lowest in population density (7).

Rasuwa district consists of ten pañcāyats - Chilime, Gatlang, Goljung and Thuman to the west of the Bhote Kholā, and Timure, Bridim, Langtang, Syabru, Dhunche and Ramche to the east - each with its own representative who carries out directives from the central government, collects taxes on their behalf, maintains law and order and settles petty disputes. Sometimes the administrative village coincides with a particular village as geographically or spatially defined but more often it is a convenient amalgamation of several villages, each with its already existing structures of political authority and factions, and who may thus become rivals in their attempts to have elected their

favoured candidate as representative. Of the ten administrative villages Syabru is the largest with 1287 inhabitants and Langtang the smallest with 353 people (8). Finally, the administrative village is split up into a number of wards of about 20 to 25 contiguous households, each ward being represented on the local council. Syabru consists of 9 wards: 3 of them comprise Thulo Syabru and nearby hamlets, 2 comprise Thulo Bharku and one each coincides with Sāno Bharku, Syabru Bēsi, Brābal and Komin.

Rasuwa district is unusual in the multi-ethnic society of Nepal in that its population appears surprisingly homogeneous in character. The early 19th century British visitors to Nepal knew of the existence of the ethnic group they called 'Murmis' (9), a name for the Tamangs which now seems to have fallen into disuse, and Hodgson, the British Resident at Kathmandu, provided a small vocabulary of their language (Hodgson, 1874), but they seemed unaware of the concentration of Tamangs to the north of Kathmandu. It was not until the visit of Tilman and Polunin in 1949 on a botanical and climbing expedition that a more precise idea emerged of the nature of the population in these parts who, indeed, have frequently been mistaken for Sherpas by outsiders.

More recently, the 1971 Census reveals that of the total population in the district of 17,517, 83 per cent or 14,544 persons are Tamang speakers (HMG of Nepal, 1973). These figures need to be treated with caution but it is clear that in the northern part of the district the proportion is even higher - probably 95 per cent (10). Evidently the periods of Tibetan control coupled with the rocky slopes and poor soil of the region have discouraged the penetration of the Hindu settlers who have displaced other tribal groups from their lands in more fertile and accessible parts of the country. The local people have been left to pursue their traditional way of life largely undisturbed, except for the occasional eruptions of war already mentioned.

According to one point of view this area is the original home of the Tamang people (Hagen, op cit: 82); according to another they were driven there before the advancing armies of Gorkha who had no liking for their Buddhist faith (Hamilton, 1819: 52-3). The people's own traditions hold that their origins were in Tibet. In the distant past they claim that they were a military people originally known as the Tamak whose ancestor, Lhake Dorje, led them from Tibet by way of Kyirong and Jhārlang into the valleys of the Ānkhu Kholā and

Bhote Kholā. Here they found the Ghale kings ruling the area from their fortified castles or encampments (dzong; Tib. rdzong) whose remains can still be seen above villages such as Syabru and Sharku. After a struggle the Ghales were overthrown and, according to legend, driven from the area round Syabru back as far as Dhunche (11). It is said that supernatural sanctions prevent the return of the Ghales to Syabru for they cannot live there without fear of sickness and death. And in fact the only Ghale inhabitants are two women whose natal village is Dhunche and who have married men in Syabru.

The ministerial class of that era has been absorbed by the Tamangs, becoming the Thokra clan, but the descendants of the Ghales who are more numerous in the south of the region are still regarded as a separate group of higher status than the Tamangs. Although to outsiders apparently indistinguishable from Tamangs and functioning much like a Tamang clan, the Ghales preserve their separateness in a modified form of speech which uses special honorific terms and in a restrictive diet which forbids them to eat beef, pork and chicken. It is not clear, however, that their status carries with it any concomitant wealth or political advantage nowadays.

The early waves of Tamang migrants were followed by others from the north who have preserved a stronger attachment to the language and customs of Tibet. A number of settlements north of the Langtang Kholā contain speakers of a Tibetan dialect which is quite distinct from Tamang speech. These include the villages of Langtang, Bridim, Timure, known locally as Setang, and Thuman, known as Tongbin. In addition to the linguistic differences there are differences in styles of dress and ornamentation, house-building and farming practice, while a number of non-Tamang clans are known to occur (on the situation in Langtang see Frank, n.d.). Despite these differences these newcomers (who seem to have arrived in the middle of the 19th century) regard themselves and are regarded by others as Tamangs. They have a number of clans in common, share the same marriage regulations, religious system and general myths. They are linked together by trading agreements, by common pilgrimages and by a certain amount of intermarriage although from the limited information available this does not seem to be common.

In addition to these immigrants from the north there has been a steady trickle over a number of generations of people from Helambu to

the east, where there is a mixed Sherpa and Tamang population (Goldstein, 1975). Three or four generations ago these people evidently acquired land in Rasuwa district without difficulty although it is unlikely that that would be possible now. Tamang arrivals are absorbed into the local population almost immediately but Sherpa settlers keep a separate ethnic identity up to the third generation. The Sherpa numbers are boosted further by the continuing practice of intermarriage between Tamang men and Sherpa women from Helambu. Matches are made at the halfway point between the two regions, Gosāikund, on the occasion of the big annual pilgrimage there in August.

The most recent influx of all has been that of the Tibetan refugees who left their villages around Kyirong in 1959 and the years thereafter, and slipped over the frontier with their families and valuables to escape the Chinese occupation of the country. They have remained ever since and in 1973 were established in four purpose-built camps at Syabru Bēsi, Thangmujet, Kungjima and Bridim. They presently number about 350 altogether and, since they are not permitted to own land, subsist on a combination of trade, handicrafts and services for the tourist business and aid from refugee organizations. Their welcome was at first somewhat less than enthusiastic from the local people who, not surprisingly, feared they might lose their own land to the new arrivals and looked with envy on the aid which people apparently better off than themselves received. The Tibetans for their part regard the Tamangs as a rather dirty, lazy people with no business acumen or interest in education who largely deserve their lot as peasants. One 13-year old Tibetan girl gave her view of refugee life in the following essay:

'I live in Shyabru Bensi. It is between two rivers. The old men are making a Tibetan shoes. And women are making Tibetan belts and coats. It is not so big. It has 61 Tibetan people and 81 Tamangs..... Tamang people are working their fields. They plant rice and maize. They have card games and quarrel. Our Tibetan people have four festivals in a year. The Tamang people have a lot of festivals in a year.....' (12).

Over the years a modus vivendi has emerged between the refugees and the Tamangs and relations are cordial enough although each group keeps itself aloof. There is no intermarriage or combining of common festivals and the Tibetans continue to maintain the customs which they brought from their homelands where they dream of returning

one day.

A similar pattern of immigration has been uncovered among the population of the Solu-Khumbu region to the east of Kathmandu. The situation there is rather more complex owing to intermarriage between Sherpas and other Nepali tribes, giving rise to new groupings of intermediate status between long-established Sherpas and recent immigrants. But basically the ethnographers of Sherpa society represent the waves of immigration as a series of concentric rings moving from the centre of longest-established 'proto-clans' out through pseudo-clans and new arrivals (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1964: 27; Oppitz, 1968: 100 & 1974: 236). The population of northern Rasuwa district may be visualized in much the same way. Seen from the Tamang perspective there is a core of Tamang clans who have been settled in the area for at least 250 years. Then comes a 'ring' of different, but closely connected groups - the Ghaes, the Sherpa immigrants and the Tibetan speaking 'Tamangs' found in Langtang and the border area. The outer 'ring' is made up of those who are most separate and most recently arrived - the Tibetan refugees.

Thus the ethnic homogeneity of the area becomes less apparent when subjected to closer scrutiny than a census can achieve. Nevertheless, the range of diversity is not very great and the people of the region do share a common rather isolated environment and way of life, and in particular belong to the same religious tradition (13), factors which tend to mark Rasuwa district off as a culturally and ecologically distinct part of the mosaic of Nepal.

The village - settlement pattern and population

For the people of Syabru and the nearby hamlets the divisions into administrative villages and wards have little significance for they ignore long-established patterns of settlement which are based less on administrative convenience than on Tamang perceptions of local topography and their myths of arrival and occupation which link particular clans with particular areas. Hereafter in referring to 'the village' or 'the main village' I mean not the administrative unit but the actual grouping of some 58 houses together with the school, temple, shops, springs and so on that is Syabru as far as local people are concerned.

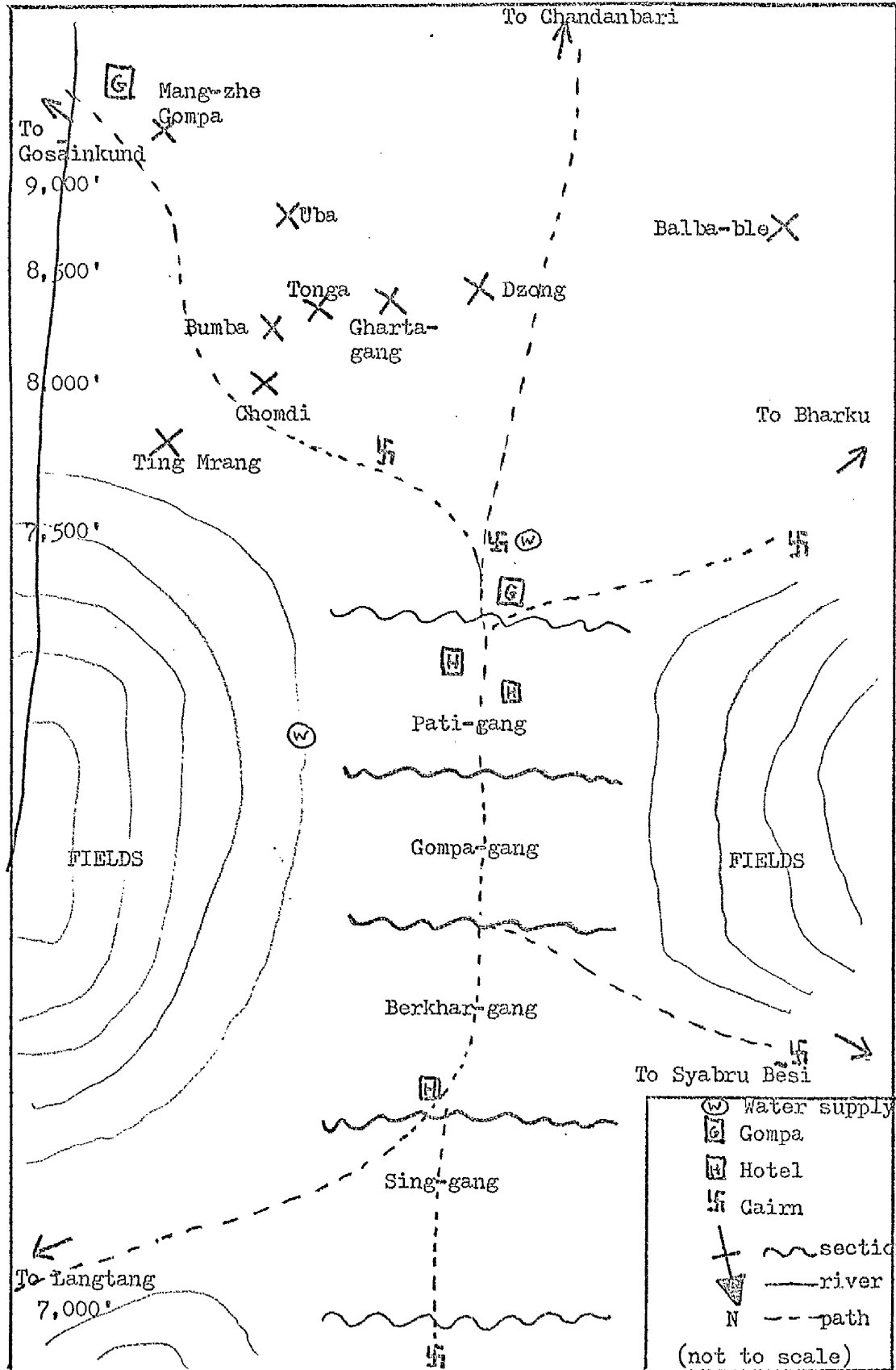
The main village of Syabru is clearly demarcated from its surroundings both by its natural situation and by various man-made features.

It stands atop a narrow ridge at 7,200 feet which runs out at right angles from the main 12-15,000 feet east-west range of hills like the buttress of a high wall. The axis of the slope is northwards, down towards the Langtang Kholā and beyond it the bulk of the great mountain Langtang Lirung (23,770 feet); below the village the north slope falls so precipitously to the river that the land cannot be cultivated. To the west the ground falls away almost as steeply but here has been painstakingly terraced into the patchwork of numerous tiny fields which make up part of the village lands. To the east the fit of the buttress into the main hillside has created a sort of sheltered bowl and it is here that the best fields are to be found.

The houses are all built to face south-east where they get the maximum warmth and sunshine, although in the winter months this is reduced by the high surrounding hills. To the east the houses look out across their fields and up the Langtang Kholā towards the snow-covered peaks at the head of the valley. On the far side of the river the fields of the small hamlet of Syārpagaū are just visible, while to the west there is the confluence of the rivers and the village of Syabru Bēsi far below; beyond rise the hills around Thuman and, farther away still, the whole Ganesh Himāl range. To the south the hills rise steeply to the lakes of Gosāikund.

Paths leave the village in five different directions. From the top are two running south up the hill - one, the new main route to the cheese factory at Chandanbāri, the other taking a more easterly route via a number of hamlets to Mang-zhe Gumpa. To the west is the main path via the villages of Brābal, Bharku, Dhunche to Trisuli Bazaar; from the bottom of the village this trail continues east up the Langtang Kholā, providing a new route for traffic to Langtang which formerly had to go via Syabru Bēsi and proceed up the north bank of the river. The village boundaries are marked at each of the four cardinal points by small dilapidated cairns (chōten; Tib. mchod-rten) of considerable antiquity which are faced with flat stones on which Buddhist prayers have been carved.

At the top of the village separated from the houses themselves is a tree-lined knoll on which stands the Buddhist temple (gumpa), a whitewashed building with a slate roof, which contains religious statues and paintings, the altar table and various ritual implements; in front stands a line of tall poles from which prayer-flags flutter. It is kept closed by the sacristan except when in use for a particu-



Map 3 - Syabru sections and hamlets

lar ceremony. Its attractive, slightly isolated position echoes the classical conception embodied in its name of a hermitage or refuge. To the rear of the building a small schoolhouse has been added and at the front a separate kitchen recently built to provide a place where tea and food can be prepared for larger ceremonies.

Other significant features of the village include the water supply which is either from a small stream with an erratic flow behind the temple where a now defunct prayer-wheel stands or, lower down the village, a spring hidden in a grove of trees. The sparseness of the supply and its distance from the houses means that one of the major tasks of the women and older children is to transport water in large copper pots in baskets on their backs from stream to house. This is usually done twice a day, in the early morning and again in the evening. The water spout is one of the main meeting places in the village where people come to do their washing, scour pans, soak bamboo and rinse wool, or simply to gossip in the sunshine.

Finally, the village boasts a teahouse and three small 'trekking lodges' which also function as shops. The teahouse, run by a cripple, serves tea only and that mainly to passing travellers for few villagers would consider wasting their money on such an extravagance; it also keeps a small stock of soap, cloth, cigarettes and bidis for local consumption. The trekking lodges are a recent innovation which have sprung up to satisfy the demand from western tourists for overnight accommodation and food on their way to Langtang. Each has about 10 wooden beds with mattresses in one large room, and a separate kitchen where efforts are made with the limited ingredients available to provide the sort of food which westerners appear to like. A small stock of tinned goods and bottled drinks is also kept.

The village acts collectively in a number of ways: there is a common responsibility for the upkeep of the paths and to provide free labour for work on civic or religious buildings; there is a duty to support the bi-annual ritual directed at obtaining the protection of the village god; finally there is an obligation to provide alms once a year for the support of the village priests. None of these duties is undertaken with great enthusiasm and it sometimes seems that only social pressure persuades people to remember their communal obligations at all.

The village is further subdivided into four sections or 'hills'

(gang; Tib. sgang). According to local accounts each of the sections was first settled by a particular clan. The first-comers were the Shangbas who settled in Pati-gang, built the first house and cleared the first fields. Then came the Pidakos who built their house in Gompa-gang (not to be confused with a nearby village of the same name). After them were the Tebas who settled in Berkhar-gang and then the Singdens who occupied Sing-gang. Various myths (which I examine in more detail in Chapter 4) attended these arrivals. It seems quite likely that originally land and dwellings were grouped together according to clan but over the generations as houses collapse and are rebuilt elsewhere and parcels of land sold off any relationship between residence, land and clan has vanished and the various clans are now found scattered throughout the village. However, one still finds that some of the smaller hamlets are occupied by a single clan who have their fields grouped together (e.g. Mang-zhe is a Karmapa clan hamlet). The sections have no collective responsibilities as such but each month groups of 6 contiguous households must combine together to sponsor a feast for the whole village (the tse-chu ritual analysed in Chapter 6).

The houses in the main village are not set amidst their fields but are closely grouped together in a long straggling line which follows the crest of the ridge; many are terraced in blocks of 4 or 5. Some of the older ones are in ruins, waiting to be re-built and a number show evidence of recent construction, following several fires which devastated parts of the village. The four sections follow one another down the village, the divisions between each marked only by a sudden fall in the level, an outcrop of rock or a path entering between the houses.

A number of households own more than one dwelling, alternating between the main village and a secondary home in one of the nearby hamlets as their work takes them to fields at a higher altitude. 15 households own two dwellings and 1 owns three. Thus of the 58 village houses only 54 constitute the principal residence of their owners, while in the hamlets only 20 of the total of 33 houses are principal residences. Because of this multiple ownership and because those households with cattle or sheep herds also have temporary dwellings (N - goth) near the pastures the residential pattern over the whole year is a complex one; it is rare for even half the main village houses to be occupied simultaneously. There is a general

Section name	No. of households	Inhabitants
Pati-gang	11	57
Gompa-gang	12	70
Berkhar-gang	17	85
Sing-gang	14	83
Main village total	54	295
<u>Hamlets</u>		
Ting Mrang	2	7
Chomdi	4	25
Bumba	1	3
Tonga	3	13
Gharta-gang	4	29
Dzong	-	-
Dong-nga Kharka	1	4
Uba	1	5
Balba-ble	1	5
Mang-zhe Gompa	3	12
Hamlets total	20	103
OVERALL TOTAL	74	398

Table 1. Syabru and hamlets - distribution of households and number of inhabitants

exodus from the main village in late spring to plough the high fields and move the cattle to the high pastures, then a return in mid-summer for the harvests and planting the second crop, then another move to the hamlets for the potato harvest in the autumn. Thus the main village only really presents a picture of busy activity in the winter months from November to January when during the slack season the majority of households are in residence and their cattle herds are brought down again to graze on the stubble in the village fields. Table 1 shows the distribution of households in the village sections and the hamlets and the numbers of people who principally reside in each.

Of the total population of 398, 295 people may be regarded as principally resident in the main village. Of these 150 (50.8%) are male and 145 (49.2%) are female. A detailed breakdown of these 295 by age and sex is shown in Figure 1. These figures cannot be regarded as totally accurate since in some cases women's and

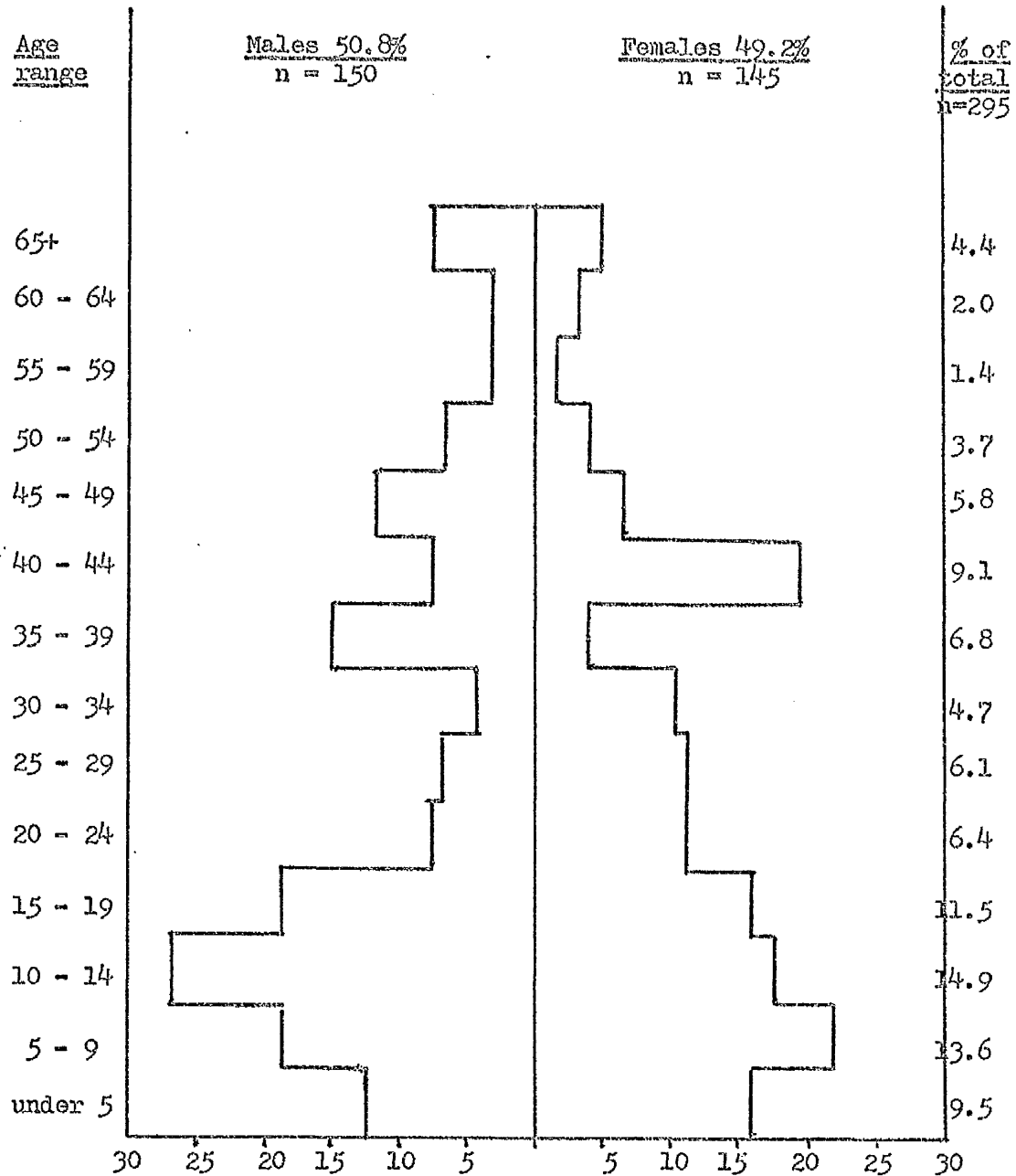


Fig. 1. Population of Syabru village by age and sex

children's ages were reported by men. Nevertheless the general pattern revealed is believed to be valid and is comparable with census figures for the region as a whole (14).

The pattern suggests a birthrate well above the mere replacement level but one in which the rate of increase has declined over the last decade. In the first decade females outnumber males, a trend which is reversed in the 10 - 19 age bracket. The fall in numbers of the 20 - 35 age group is attributable partly to the high incidence of

death during childbirth among women, and partly to the continuing emigration of young people to Kathmandu and to India in search of work. Altogether 9 men and 6 women are known to be living abroad, some in the North-east Frontier region of India where they have found lucrative employment as peons and clerks in government offices. Unlike Gurung villages Syabru does not have a strong tradition of service in the Gurkhas to relieve the pressure on local resources and pump fresh money into the economy (15); unlike the Gurkha soldiers who usually return to their villages after a period of service in the army the young people who leave Syabru tend to sever their links with the village and do not return.

This trend is bound to continue and even increase, for the most striking point about the figures is that half the total population is aged under 20. As these young people grow to maturity they will require an increasing share of the available resources in order to marry and found their own families. However, being part of the Langtang National Park the land is strictly controlled and further expansion virtually impossible. Already the population exceeds the number which could be fully self-sufficient on the basis of agriculture alone and many members of the new generation will be faced with the choice between supporting themselves by wage-labour (e.g. portering) for all or part of the year, or leaving the area (16).

The principal check on population growth remains the very high rate of infant mortality which on the basis of information collected from a sample of 40 women I would estimate at about 30% during the first 5 years. The family planning service sponsored by the government is at present too erratic to have any impact.

Gaining a livelihood - agriculture and animal husbandry

Land is still measured in the old units called hal (N), one hal being the area which a pair of oxen can plough in a day. The total under cultivation by the 74 households of Syabru and the hamlets is 475 hal, an average of 6.4 hal per household. It is difficult to translate the hal measurement into a square measurement, a difficulty compounded by the fact that it is not even true to say that a man who owned say 6 hal could actually plough it in 6 days, for in reality he may have to work on 20 or more tiny plots, some separated by up to an hour's walk, for over the generations the land has been endlessly subdivided by the inheritance system and the various plots sold, repurchased and sold again, making it almost impossible for any one

owner to group his fields together. Although more laborious in some ways, the scattering of plots does have certain advantages, for it means firstly that everyone has a reasonable chance of some land in the sunny well-watered areas as well as some of the poorer, stony fields and secondly, that as the plots cover an altitude range of some 2,000 feet it is possible to stagger the work-load at harvest and ploughing times to take advantage of the slightly different growing seasons.

On the basis of claimed crop yields it is possible to make a rough estimate that one hal is very approximately equal to half an acre (one hal is said to produce 4 muri or about 640 lbs of wheat or millet). Every household owns some land and none are in the position of tenant farmers or wage labourers. However, the range of variation is only between 2 and 12 hal per household, so that no family can be said to be particularly wealthy in terms of land alone, nor were any families affected by the 1964 Lands Act which placed a ceiling of 10.4 acres on each holding. No more land is available, even for the better-off who might be in a position to increase their holdings. Small parcels of land do come up for sale from time to time when someone dies without heirs, emigrates or needs extra cash for an expensive wedding or funeral, but most people do their best to retain what they have got. It is arguable that for a man at any rate his sense of identity as a villager is crucially tied up with the control of land, as is his ability to exert influence in village affairs. Only minors and cretins do not own land and in many ways they are less than full village members.

All members of the household participate in agricultural work once they reach the age of 8 or so. The agricultural year begins in early February, soon after the Tibetan New Year celebrations have ended, with the first ploughing and the spreading of manure (du) from the household midden on the fields. By enriching the soil in this way two crops a year can be obtained from half the land; in addition the crops are rotated annually between the eastern and western slopes so that the soil does not become depleted; no land is left fallow. Ploughing (klap mō-pə) is done only by men; they use a pair of yoked oxen (klap) with a wooden plough and a metal tipped share. Many households possess their own oxen but those that do not must hire them at the rate of Rs. 2.50 per day from others.

From mid-March to mid-April the planting of maize (N - makai) in the lower fields and then potatoes (teme) in the higher fields continues. In amongst the maize three other minor crops are sown - soya beans (modé), pumpkins (N - pharsi) and mendo (an unidentified flower). The busiest season of the year begins in June and runs to the end of October. First the wheat (planted the previous autumn) must be harvested before the monsoon rains begin. The ears are not cut but nipped off using a pair of bamboo sticks, then dropped in a basket to be carried up to the houses where threshing takes place with a flail consisting of a rotating bamboo head fixed to a wooden pole; this work is done by both men and women usually working in groups of four to six. At the same time weeding of the young maize shoots must be done, a tedious back-breaking task performed by the women who form communal work parties of 15 to 25 people, often working 10 to 12 hours daily. As soon as the wheat harvest is completed and the stubble cleared the fields must be ploughed to make way for the millet (kodo; eleusine coracana). The seeds must be individually drilled rather than broadcast and subsequently the same laborious weeding performed throughout the monsoon period. Again groups of women work together, one field at a time, covering themselves against the rain with sheets of polythene or, more traditionally, rain shields made from leaves plaited into a lattice-work of bamboo.

Meanwhile through August the men are attending to the raising of the potato crop, then ploughing those fields and sowing barley (kharu). It is only those households with extensive potato fields (found at the higher altitudes around 8,500 feet) who can be confident of a plentiful food supply throughout the year, for potatoes produce a large surplus. One hal produces between 20 and 30 muri of potatoes of which one third is kept back for replanting, one third is for own consumption and one third sold to the villagers of the Gatlang area. At the prevailing rate of Rs.80 per muri one hal will thus produce in addition to a food supply a profit of between Rs. 550 and 800 which in turn can be used to buy rice and other necessities in Trisuli Bazaar.

Having dealt with the potatoes the maize harvest also begins in August, groups of two or three household members working together to cut the stalks and strip the cobs. The corn is both eaten fresh and dried in the sun for winter consumption. In September other minor crops are harvested, including an oil-bearing plant (nam-nam), haricot

beans (tamra), radishes (N - mūlā) and chillies (N - khorsāni). The millet and barley are harvested in October and the year ends in November with the final ploughing and the sowing of next year's wheat crop.

The smooth-running of all this intensive activity is threatened not only by bad weather but by the constant depredations of wild animals, particularly the wild pig (tohka), and by the risk of diseased crops. The pigs (and sometimes langur monkeys too) root up the potatoes and ravage the maize. The only means of protection is for every family to build a small shelter on stilts in the midst of their principal fields and to man it every night (an unpopular job usually delegated to teenagers). Throughout the night they must burn a bright fire and keep up a constant cacophony of banging and shouting to scare them away. The crops are untreated with pesticides and are frequently subject to rot and pests; seeds supplied by the government cannot always be relied on to be sound. In 1977 the maize crop failed, only a quarter of the expected harvest being obtained, leading to widespread hardship in the following spring when food supplies are at their lowest.

As can be seen, the other side of the coin to the rising population and increasing pressure on scarce resources is the continual need for labour. Ironically the more people there are in a household the easier becomes the work but the fewer the resources available for each. Every household has to achieve a difficult balance between labour and natural resources to ensure the optimum level of production but this cannot always be done. Family size is crucial because it is almost impossible to hire outside labour except very occasionally since everybody else has his own fields to attend to. Labour can only be obtained on a reciprocal basis and if the family is small one's obligations cannot be repaid.

The case of Nyima illustrates this dilemma. Nyima spent the Second World War as a Gurkha soldier and amassed sufficient money to return to his village and purchase substantial fields and a good herd of cattle, becoming in time a wealthy and respected man. He produced only one son and one daughter, both of whom married, the son having two children. For a time all seemed to be going well. But then the son decided to emigrate to India in search of more lucrative work and his wife returned to her own family, leaving Nyima and his wife

to bring up their grandchildren. Nyima's daughter, although married, continued to live with her father for her husband had not yet received his own inheritance. Thus Nyima's workforce amounted to only three adults - himself and his wife, now grown old, and his daughter - to cope with 8 hal (4 acres) of fields and a large cattle herd, as well as all the other tasks which have to be performed - woodcutting, trade trips etc. The only way he could manage was by employing his son-in-law on a casual basis and even then life was such a struggle that he talked seriously of journeying to India to find his son and issuing an ultimatum: either return to help with the farm or the whole lot would be sold (i.e. the boy's inheritance) and he would retire to live off the capital.

Nyima's problems were compounded by the necessity of managing a herd in addition to his fields, a task usually only attempted by those with a larger workforce. While all villagers have to engage in a certain amount of agricultural production to ensure a basic food supply the ceiling on land availability means that a family can only become truly rich through the ownership of cattle - a high-risk but also high-income activity. In all 47 households, about two-thirds of the total, own a total of 390 cattle (yaks, cows, crossbreeds and oxen) but with the modal average at 5 per household it can be seen that in many cases the herd consists of nothing more than a couple of oxen for ploughing and a couple of crossbreeds to provide the household with milk and butter. The big herds are concentrated in relatively few hands, only 14 households owning more than 10 animals; the largest herd is 37. Herd ownership correlates with size of land holdings; in other words, those who are already rich through land and can produce a surplus turn it to good account by diversifying into cattle. 4 of the 5 biggest landowners are among the 14 cattle families; all but two of the 14 own more than the average landholding.

Unlike cultivable land there is no shortage of pasture land at present and the villagers have been stimulated to increase their herds largely as a result of government action in building cheese 'factories' throughout the area, in offering loans through the Agricultural Development Bank and in providing a rudimentary veterinary service. A few villagers have maintained their independence of these government schemes by building up their herds gradually through skilful purchases and breeding and then sell the produce privately, but others have substantial debts (Rs. 10,000 and

more) which they pay off by selling their milk to the government cheese factories; in addition a small tax must be paid for grazing rights on government owned pastures. During the 5 months operation from April onwards these 'factories' (e.g. at Chandanbāri and at Kyang-jin Gomba) produce between 30 and 50 kilos of hard cheese daily, as well as soft cheese and butter, all of which is portered to Kathmandu for sale there.

Yak and cows are kept primarily for breeding since the only animal which gives a copious amount of rich milk is the crossbreed (dzomo; Tib. mdzo-mo) and then only during the summer months; in the winter milk is all but unobtainable and for butter - a highly valued substance used more for ritual purposes than for everyday consumption - people rely on supplies stored in goat-skins (mar-kung) which keep reasonably fresh for several months. Few yak are owned since they are very expensive to buy - costing up to Rs. 2,000 each - and rather temperamental animals which do not adjust well to the lower altitudes round Syabru. In order to take advantage of different pastures and the changing seasons the herds must be moved every month or so. During the winter they graze on private, lineage-owned lands in the vicinity of Syabru Bēsi then, as the weather improves, they move up through the main village to the higher communal pastures, reaching an altitude of 13,000 feet in August; then they reverse their course down again to reach the village fields in November where they graze on the stubble and help to manure the soil.

Potentially highly lucrative, cattle herding is also a risky activity for the animals are prone to falls and broken bones on the steep hillsides and if they fall ill there is little in the way of treatment available. Thus in a bad year several thousand rupees of stock may be wiped out in an epidemic or a series of falls. Cattle are never slaughtered but should they die a natural death the neat is butchered, dried and sold to other villagers, the skins are dried and exported and the intestines are used to make a glue.

As well as cattle other livestock is kept, including sheep (kyu), goats (rā) and chickens (na-pum). 33 households keep flocks of sheep and goats ranging in size from 2 to 36 animals, a total of 460. They are kept almost exclusively for their wool which is subsequently turned into blankets, the half-sleeved jackets (baku) worn by all men and the backcloths (syāma) worn by women. Apart from the shearing, done

twice annually, women perform the whole operation from washing and carding the wool to spinning it and weaving the cloth on back-strap looms. Chickens are kept both for their eggs - produced infrequently but prized as a specially lavish food for offering to guests - and for their numerous uses in religious rituals, as well as for sale to passing tourists and visitors.

Other economic activities and occupational specialization

Agriculture and animal husbandry form the backbone of the village economy but villagers also exploit a considerable variety of other sources of income. Lack of space precludes a detailed examination of the interesting mechanics of some of these activities which can only be briefly summarized here.

One of the most important of these is trade. Twice a year most adult men take a break from farming to make the journey to Kyirong in Tibet. Groups of half a dozen men set off together, taking 5 to 7 days on the round trip, carrying with them unrefined sugar previously bought in Trisuli Bazaar, yak skins, rice and chillies (17). In Kyirong their wares are assigned a notional cash value which is then translated at a favourable rate of exchange into the salt, brick tea and manufactured items such as vacuum flasks, matches and shoes which they carry back. Most of these things are for own consumption but a few entrepreneurs make a profit by then carrying the brick-tea on to the Helambu region which has no direct access to Tibet and where it fetches a good price. In Kyirong no cash changes hands, all trade is through government stores rather than with private individuals and the Tamang visitors are put up in government hostels and to a certain extent segregated from the local people. Nearer at hand there are also trading relationships with the people of Langtang who produce very little grain and so buy additional supplies from Syabru, and with people living in villages to the west of the Bhote Kholā who purchase potatoes from Syabru.

Almost as important as trade is the annual pilgrimage to Gosāikund when upwards of 4,000 Hindu pilgrims arrive at the sacred lakes there to celebrate the janaipurnimā festival at the full moon of Bhadau (August). For the Tamangs of Syabru this (as well as being a religious occasion for them too) is an opportunity to make a good cash income by providing temporary shelters for the thousands of pilgrims who spend the night at the inhospitable lakeside site. Most house-

holds send one or two of their fittest members up to the site with building materials to erect temporary huts out of bamboo mats thrown over a structure of bent poles; the trekking lodge proprietors also profit from the occasion by setting up kitchens and small shops at the site. Each hut can accommodate 40 to 50 pilgrims who each pay Rs. 2 per night, so that with two or three huts a man can earn Rs. 300 for very little effort.

A variety of other casual and occasional means of bringing in extra money are undertaken by small numbers of villagers. These include portering for tourists during the trekking season at a rate of Rs. 15-20 per day, something which only those with a pressing need for cash and a lack of other commitments will do; collecting the wild plants and herbs used in ayurvedic medicine which can be sold in Trisuli for Rs. 30 per dhārnī (6 lbs.), a diminishing business owing to overexploitation of the natural products; making handmade paper from the inner bark of daphne bushes which requires an expensive government licence because of the enormous quantities of wood used in the drying process; and a growing handicraft industry set up under the auspices of the government's cottage industry department to teach the young women to weave cotton cloth on a proper mechanical loom. Portering, handicrafts and the provision of services to tourists are all likely to offer increasing opportunities to earn an income not tied to agricultural work, as the region develops in popularity as a holiday area and communications are improved.

There is very little occupational specialization in the village since all members must give the majority of their attention to their agricultural duties and in any case there are few tasks which villagers cannot perform for themselves. The main exceptions are certain elaborate types of carpentry and the direction of the religious life of the community.

House-building is an expensive but fairly unskilled operation since it mainly requires crude labour to get the materials to the site. Most men are able to do the rough shaping of beams and boards. The exception is the carving of the elaborate intricately designed wooden window frames which take up most of the frontage of the house. The social standing, or at any rate social pretensions, of any household can be accurately gauged from the quality of their window - the more intricate its carving and joints the more expensive and hence pres-

tigious; an average window costs in the region of Rs. 500; the poorest families make do with a wickerwork screen until such time as they can afford a proper wood frame. There are four part-time carpenters in the village who work on windows, housebuilding and make items of furniture (mainly altars and beds - chairs and tables are not used). They earn Rs. 5 per day plus a daily meal and their average annual income is about Rs. 300-400.

There are two main types of religious specialist in the village - the shaman (bombo; Tib. dbon-po) who performs a variety of rites concerned with divination, curing, exorcism and the propitiation of territorial spirits, and the Buddhist lamas who are in charge of the calendrical and life-cycle rituals as well as some curative rites. There is usually only one shaman to a village (although they frequently travel to other villages as well) and they have no fixed fees, instead being paid according to the scale of the ceremony performed and the results achieved. Sometimes the rewards can be dramatically large, in all senses, as in the case of the Syabru shaman who was once given a yak worth Rs. 1,000 by a grateful client, but overall the income from shamanizing is unpredictable and not very great. The lamas are much more numerous for not only are their powers transmitted in the male line to all members of the lineage but they are employed in groups; in Syabru there are 9 and in every sizeable village one finds 5 or 6. Their support is derived partly from charitable donations by the villagers and partly from payments made by the sponsors of particular ceremonies at a fixed rate of Rs. 5 per day plus food. Like the carpenters their annual income is around Rs. 300 plus about a month's supply of grain, so here again it must be supplemented by agricultural work.

Finally there are the millers (chuda dopta), half a dozen families living in the vicinity of the hamlet of Chomdi who own water-mills on the fast stream nearby. They act as millers for the whole village charging at the rate of one measure for every 12 measures of flour milled. There are two other principal needs which are not catered for locally - smithing and tailoring. Unlike many Nepalese villages those in northern Rasuwa have no resident households of Kāmis (blacksmiths) and Damāis (tailors). These low-caste functions are fulfilled by travelling smiths and tailors who come up from villages to the south on two or three occasions a year, remaining in the village a month or so to deal with the backlog of work which has built up.

Symbolic space, sacred geography and the religious calendar

The preceding pages have dealt with the 'objective' features of the landscape of northern Nepal and the settlement pattern and work activities of the Tamangs of Syabru. However, if we look briefly at these topics again from the Tamang point of view their utilitarian character becomes muted and they can be seen as aspects of a system of meaning with their own symbolic values. One is no longer concerned with topography but with a sacred geography; no longer with settlement patterns and population, but with a web of inter-relationships between men, their land, their neighbours and the earth spirits; no longer with a pragmatic program of work but a round of activities in which men's work dovetails with their religious ceremonies and both are aspects of the cosmic cycle.

The principal conceptual divisions of local space are into mountains (gang-ri), forest (N - ban), grazing lands (N - kharka), fields (kle) and village (namsa). As we have seen the village is further divided into sections and finally individual houses (tihm; ?Tib. khyim). These divisions in effect form a continuum between most private, intimate and fully human and most exposed, alien and dangerous. Mountains are the abode of gods who oversee the territory round about but are otherwise remote; people have no occasion to go too near them except when crossing a mountain pass, an activity verging on trespass and fraught with supernatural dangers, not least of which is an encounter with the terrifying snowmen (gang-ta; nyel-mo). The forest is unambiguously dangerous and people avoid walking there alone, preferring to go in company and sing loudly as they walk; it is the home not only of bears but of the forest deity (N - banraja) and the malevolent shing sa demons. Village lands are intermediate between the human and the non-human worlds; men have the use of them but only through the cooperation of the various territorial spirits, in particular the serpent spirits (lu; Tib. klu) who are liable to attack if they are offended in some way. Any of these forces may penetrate into the village itself which, however, can be fortified against them by various rituals of propitiation and exorcism and by invoking the protection of the village god.

The most intimate area of all is the house itself which is also under the protection of the head of the household's personal deity. The house is the focus of the family's cooperative activity where they

can retire temporarily from the pressures of the outside world, safe from their enemies, the gossip of neighbours, and attacks by demons. Even within the living area different parts have their own significance. The back corner of the room, furthest from the window and behind the cooking hearth, is the women's area (mo-tel); here the lady of the house presides over the fire and the preparation and serving of food, surrounded by heavy padlocked wooden storage chests containing grain, clothing and valuables, and racks with a miscellany of cooking pots, copper and enamel dishes, mugs and glasses. Here too the youngest children cluster and at night sleep with their mother, and visiting women make for this area automatically.

The men's section of the house (pho-tel) lies between the fire and the window (kar-khung; Tib. skar-khung) at the front of the house. Directly under the window is placed a wooden bed (ti; Tib. khri) reserved for the use of the head of the household and for honoured visitors such as lamas. This area of the room is rendered more comfortable and inviting by the addition of rugs to sit on, the display of family photographs carefully collected over the years, and religious lithographs. Next to the bed stands the tall wooden altar cabinet (chö-ti; Tib. chos-khri) containing seven brass bowls filled with water and grain offerings, flowers and pictures of the Dalai Lama or other religious figures (see Figure 2).

This organisation of household space reproduces basic aspects of male and female roles - the man in the superior comfortable position, strategically placed to deal with religious affairs and to keep an eye on events happening outside the house, the woman relegated to a dark corner to get on with the food preparation and child care which is her province.

Despite its essential privacy the house for a great part of the time may be filled with neighbours and relatives who have come to chat, to share some work task or to participate in a religious ceremony but there is never any doubt as to who is guest and who host; guests are seated in strict order and position according to age and social standing. The invitation to anyone who is not a close associate to enter this inner sanctum is attended by elaborate rituals of hospitality which seem designed to smooth over the potential embarrassment which both host and guest appear to feel is implicit in this sudden collapse of barriers. The transitional point is the house verandah

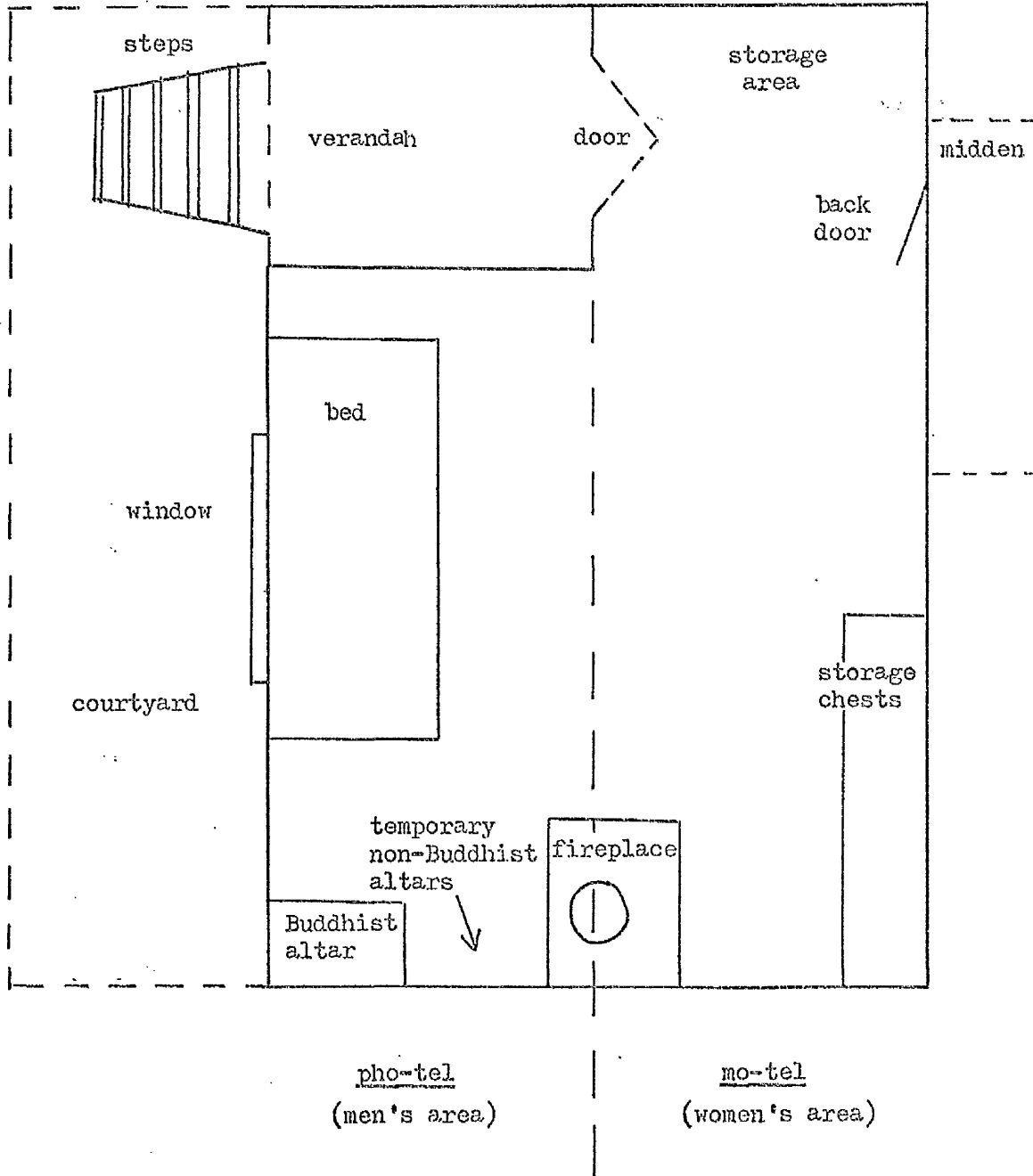


Fig 2 - The organisation of domestic space

(yapse; Tib. gyabs). Members of the unclean service castes such as blacksmiths and tailors may come this far without causing any pollution but should they cross the threshold (mrap) - which as far as I am aware they never do - it would be necessary to purify the house completely with cow dung and water. Indeed the prudent visitor does not cross this point at all without announcing his presence loudly for many houses keep a dog which is liable to appear with ferocious suddenness. The outer courtyard in front of the house is a rather more public arena used primarily for threshing and drying grain or as a pleasantly sunny spot to sit and weave or gossip. Nevertheless it strongly retains its owner's imprint and frequently during a quarrel it forms an impregnable platform from which to harangue one's opponent.

A strong value is placed on the concept of neighbourliness. Kinsmen may be widely scattered in the pursuit of their own tasks and it is to neighbours (khimse; Tib. khyim-mtshes) that one turns first for day to day assistance - people to make up working parties in the fields, or from whom small loans of food or money can be asked or who can be called on to perform a variety of small services (18). Because of the proximity of the houses one's neighbours' affairs are usually intimately known whereas one may meet people from other parts of the village only occasionally.

Overlaying these local spatial divisions is a specifically Buddhist geography. At the most general level a variety of sacred sites in the area recall the presence and activities of the founder of Tibetan Buddhism, Guru Rinpoche, who is a combination of culture hero, teacher, missionary and god rolled into one. These signs testify to his personal concern for the inhabitants of the area (and remind them of their duties towards him), and bear witness to his triumph over and subjugation of the local deities and demons. Similar phenomena have been reported from all over the Himalayas.

Locally the most prominent are two ancient cairns known as 'flasks of the Guru' (gu-ru bum-pa), one situated at Gompagang near Syabru and one at Gompaling near Setang. They are believed to be two out of 108 which the Guru created in a single night's work and are also said to be reliquaries containing part of his earthly remains (19). The sites they occupy are of great sanctity and are frequently chosen for cremations, for erecting prayer flags and for

other devotional acts. Other natural features likewise bear the imprint of the Guru's handiwork -- a large patch of white rock at the head of the Bhote Kholā valley on a hillside where he is reputed to have dried cheese (churpe; Tib. phyur-ba), so magically causing the rock to change colour; a black footprint at a site called Trashi-gang below Syabru where he is said to have been attacked by a serpent which he slew with an arrow; and a stone sentry at Langsisa at the head of the Langtang Kholā, an area said to be a 'hidden land' (beyul; Tib. sbas-yul) created for the salvation of the faithful at the end of the present era. Traditionally there are supposed to be four of these hidden lands but almost any relatively inaccessible valley tends to be identified as one. (20).

The area is also associated with the activities of another great Buddhist figure, the sage and saint Milarepa who spent a long period in meditation at a cave called Da-kar (Brag-dkar) near Kyirong and another period in Helambu (see Clarke, 1980b: 8).

Coupled with these divine manifestations are the numerous Buddhist constructions visible everywhere, in particular the cairns (chöten) at the entrance and exit of every village and along the approach paths; the decorated gateways of some, such as Syabru Bési; the long mani walls which are a prominent feature of the upper Langtang Valley; the water prayer-wheels built across streams and turned by their flow; and the gompas above almost every sizeable village.

Each gompa is the focal point of a particular 'parish' -- a community of believers who worship there and a group of religious specialists (lamas) who direct the services. As some of the parishes are too small to support the full cycle of rituals there is sometimes a system of co-operation between larger groupings of gompas, each of them undertaking one or two particular festivals in a year with the support of several communities and the assistance of all the local lamas. Syabru is part of such a group of parishes centred on four gompas -- Shing Gompa (near Chandanbāri) now ruined and unused, Mang-zhe Gompa, an isolated site south-east of Syabru whose incumbent is the senior religious leader in the area, Syabru Gompa itself where the routine monthly ceremonies are held, and Gompagang, another small village nearby, where the incumbent is a Tibetan refugee lama who has supervised the repair and refurbishment of the gompa which had previously fallen into disuse. (21)

It is convenient to end with a brief account of the religious calendar, both to situate the subsequent account of the different rituals in the appropriate time-scale and to show how the calendar is integrated with village concerns over the seasons, the crops and the harvest. The significance of the different rituals will become clearer in later chapters but a glance at the calendar of ceremonies (Table 2) shows how the majority of activity takes place in the spring and autumn around the time of planting and after the harvests; mid-winter and mid-summer have a relative paucity of events.

The Tibetan calendar is used and the new year (losar; Tib lo-gsar) begins in February with a day devoted to ensuring protection and good luck for the household as well as being the occasion for an enjoyable holiday. At dawn every household erects a new five-coloured flag on the gable-end of the house, the five strips of cloth (blue, white, yellow, green and red) said to symbolize sky, clouds, sun, trees and earth. This is accompanied by brief prayers and the offering of incense, grain and alcohol to the clan gods.

As the agricultural year gets under way there comes a whole batch of protective ceremonies designed to guarantee the safety of the household and the success of the crops - the kurim ceremonies performed by lamas and shamans for individual households (see Chapter 5), the clan-god ceremonies in April (see Chapter 4) and the village god worship directed by the tribal priest, who is distinct from the Buddhist lamas and has no other function but this. These protective rites are echoed again in November after the harvests by a second ceremony for the village god and by the Yum festival, a beating of the bounds by the lamas to drive out the serpent spirits (lü) and rid the community of bad fortune accumulated during the summer.

The agricultural year is also bracketed by two traditional Buddhist fasts (nyung-ne; Tib. smyung-gnas), one in May just before the first harvest of wheat begins when food supplies in the village are at their lowest ebb, and the other in October. The first coincides with the end of the dry season while the second marks the end of the monsoon. In Buddhist tradition the first falls in a particularly holy month regarded as an especially good time for making merit (see Chapter 6) and commemorates a number of events in the life of the Buddha. The fast in October is held in atonement for the sins committed during the immediately preceding Hindu festival of Dasain.

Table 2. Calendar of festivals

<u>Western calendar</u>	<u>Tibetan calendar</u>	<u>Festival</u>	<u>Purpose, participants and setting</u>	<u>Agricultural stage</u>
February	1st of 1st month	Losar	Village-wide celebration of New Year; households erect flags and entertain kinsmen.	Manuring of fields, preparation of soil.
February	-	Kurim	Households have shamans and lamas perform protective ceremonies	
April	3rd month	Ke-lha	Lamas perform Palten lhamo ceremony, shamans perform clan god worship. Every household sponsors own ceremony.	Planting of potatoes, maize etc. begins.
April	-	Yul-lha	Tribal priest performs worship of village god to obtain good harvest.	Cattle begin ascent from floor of valley
May	14-16th of 4th month	Nyung-ne	Fast followed by village feast at Mang-zhe Gumpa to celebrate the holy fourth month (sa-ga zla-ba).	Woodcutting, weeding of maize.
June	10th of 5th month	Tse-chu	Temple ceremony in honour of Guru Rinpoche held on 10th of every month, that of 5th month celebrating his birth	Ripening of wheat.
mid-July	-	Saune Saṅkrānti	On eve of Nepali month of Sāun households prepare special foods, make offerings to local demons.	Wet season. Wheat harvest completed. Cattle move to high pastures.
mid-July	4th of 6th month	Tukpa tse-zhi	Tibetans make pilgrimage to Compaling.	Planting of millet.
August	14-16th of 7th month	Gosaṅkund pilgrimage	Tamangs led by their shamans join Hindu Potatoes and maize harvest. pilgrims and circumambulate sacred site Barley planted	

/CONT

Table 2 cont.

<u>Western calendar</u>	<u>Tibetan calendar</u>	<u>Festival</u>	<u>Purpose, participants and setting</u>	<u>Agricultural stage</u>
mid-October	-	Dasain	Sacrifice of goats to goddess Durga; lavish feasting of kinsmen.	
mid-October	9th-11th of 9th month	Nyung-ne	Fast held at Gompagang in atonement for sins of Dasain.	Harvest of millet. End of monsoon.
November	22nd of 9th month	Iha-ba du-chen	Festival of descent from heaven	Harvest of barley.
November	-	Tihār	3-day holiday when gifts are exchanged and gambling allowed.	Final ploughing.
November	10-15th of 10th month	'Yum	Lamas read the holy books, culminating in masked dance and village protection rite.	
November	10th month	Mehto	Lamas' begging round, villagers give fruits of harvest.	
November	10th month	Yul-lha	See April.	
January	-	Māghe Sankranti	See July.	

Every 10th of the month sees a gompa ceremony (tse-chu; Tib tshes bcu) in honour of Guru Rinpoche; that of the 5th month marks his birth. In addition to these regular events there are two other traditional Buddhist celebrations although they attract nothing like the same level of popular support and are often performed with no congregation present; these are the Tukpa tse-zhi (Tib drug-pa tshes-bzhi) and Lha-ba du-chen (Tib. lha-babs dus-chen). However the former is a big occasion for the Tibetan refugees, many of whom make a short pilgrimage to Compaling (near Timure) for a night of prayer and dancing and to receive the blessing of the abbot there.

Interspersed with these local and Buddhist ceremonies it will be seen that there are a variety of Hindu festivals. These are all celebrated without any participation by Hindu priests; most are primarily family affairs given over to entertaining with minimal attention given to the associated Hindu deities. Each festival has its own special character however.

The two Sankrāntis are associated with the summer and winter solstices (22). The festival of Māgh marks the turning point of winter and looks forward to the coming of spring, while that of Sāun falls at the beginning of the rainy season, crucial for the development of the crops. In the Kathmandu Valley it is typically celebrated by bathing in sacred pools or rivers but this plays no part in the Tamang performance which is confined to a rather quiet family feast eaten after nightfall. A winnowing basket containing portions of all the items eaten is placed as an offering on the courtyard outside with burning lights set around it. Slivers of pine are thrown into the darkness, one for each member of the household, with shouts of 'let suffering depart, let good fortune come'. Married sons and daughters return to the parental home the next day to be entertained with food and drink and no work is done.

The same emphasis on household entertaining and the offering of lights and flowers is found in the Tihār (in India, Dewāli) festival directed at the goddess Lakṣmī who looks after the fortunes of the households that do her worship. In Syabru it spans three days: on the first garlands and salt are given to the cattle, on the second garlands and food are given to the dogs and on the third sisters offer garlands and place tikā marks on their brothers who respond with gifts of money or clothing. A great deal of gambling goes on during this period and hundreds of rupees change hands on card games and coin-tossing games.

No attempt is made to incorporate Tihār (usually pronounced Tiwār) or the two Saṅkrāntis into a Buddhist framework of values; they just exist side by side with the festivals of Tibetan origin in a relaxed syncretism which feels no conflict in their differing origins and derives only pleasure from the additional opportunities they create for renewing and strengthening family bonds. The position is rather different with the other major Hindu festival, that of Dasain held in October in honour of the goddess Durga. This occasion is of such importance nationwide that only the most remote communities could ignore it, the festivities in some parts lasting a fortnight during which government offices, schools and many shops are closed. In Syabru it occupies a single day which begins with the early morning sacrifice of a goat by many households. An altar is constructed outside the house on the courtyard and decorated with pictures of Durga and offerings of flowers, rice, butter and money; around it is drawn a series of chalk lines. The goat is tethered nearby and when all is ready its head is anointed with the offerings and then it is swiftly decapitated with a single blow of the knife. The head is carried around the altar, leaving a circle of bloodspots, and then placed on it. Meanwhile the carcass is bled into a bowl of flour later to be used to make black puddings. A number of people also club together to buy a water-buffalo (N - bhāisi) which is slaughtered and the meat divided among the purchasers. New clothes are worn and the rest of the day is spent in gargantuan bouts of eating and drinking.

The propitiation of Durga through offerings of blood is analogous to the ceremonies of Palten Lhamo, the Buddhist equivalent of the fearsome goddess Durga who must also be worshipped with meat and blood (see Chapter 4). The important difference is that Palten Lhamo's offerings are substitute blood and flesh while at Dasain an orgy of real killing is indulged in, in direct contravention of the Buddhist prohibition on killing. For this reason the single day of slaughter is followed immediately by the three-day Buddhist fast (nyung-ne) which in part is explicitly performed as an atonement for the sins of Dasain and to earn merit to counteract their harmful effects. Dasain thus stands apart from the other Hindu festivals by demanding not merely a passive acceptance of new religious forms but a radical reversal of religious norms of behaviour. The lamas

maintain their moral probity by taking no direct part in the animal sacrifices while laymen seemingly avoid too much cognitive dissonance by employing a strictly mathematical conception of sin and merit, in which every sin can be outweighed by the performance of an act of merit such as the fast. Dasain thus has overtones of a saturnalia in which normal conduct and ethics are overturned for a day, only to be re-asserted with additional force through the privations of the fast.

Conclusion

This chapter has described a little-known area of northern Nepal and introduced the Tamang village of Syabru, the people who live there and their way of life. Attention was drawn particularly to its position at the interface of Tibetan and Hindu culture. This double influence has permeated almost every aspect of Tamang life from the languages they speak (most adults are fairly fluent in Nepali and Tibetan as well as their native Tamang) to their farming practices (a cross between the nomadic herdsmen of Tibet and the settled agriculturists of central Nepal) to their trading relations (both Kyirong to the north and Trisuli to the south are important centres for them) to their religious life which blends a series of Hindu festivals with a basically Tibetan Buddhist outlook, value system and religious organization.

By comparison with others in the region Syabru is a rich village - nobody is without land or suffers dire poverty, although at some time almost everybody has experienced hardship. It is however a community rapidly approaching the limits of its viability as an increasing population is constrained by a fixed supply of land, a problem likely to be exacerbated as the rural health program improves and the rate of infant mortality falls. Other problems too threaten the local people: plentiful though wood is, the designation of the area as part of a National Park brings with it the probability that all woodcutting may have to be licensed and a fee paid for this basic necessity of life used for all cooking, heating and building; there is the prospect of a road being constructed up the Trisuli valley which would radically transform trading relationships and affect prices of crops sold and goods bought. It is ironic that although there is widespread adulation of the king the doings of his officials are the subject of deep peasant mistrust. True, schemes like the creation of the National Park have brought few perceptible benefits (although of course halting deforestation is vital to contain the

familiar problems of soil erosion and climatic change in the hills), but in fact it is government projects such as the promotion of animal husbandry and the establishment of craft centres which offer the best hope at present of injecting outside cash into the local economy and offering the young an alternative to emigration. In many ways Syabru is a community undergoing far-reaching changes.

Individual advantage and the amassing of personal wealth are important goals in village life; despite this the local ideology is not a utilitarian one but is still based on religious values. Wealth brings social standing and prestige but with them comes an obligation to spend much more lavishly on one's religious duties: rich men must sponsor many more ceremonies and on a much grander scale; through these all the community benefits, both materially and spiritually. The difference in standard of living between rich and poor is negligible for personal wealth is mostly locked up in land, cattle, houses and jewellery. When Nyima talked of selling his property and retiring to live off the capital (p 54 above) we calculated his worth at about Rs. 60,000 (= £2,500), a very large sum by Nepalese standards, and yet his way of life was extremely simple and unostentatious. Indeed, there is a strong feeling that conspicuous consumption would only invite envy and incessant demands for loans and other help so that the attitude to personal wealth is extremely secretive. Just as production is given a religious value so too the relationship of man to the land, to the seasons and to the agricultural cycle is symbolically constituted as a religious relationship; the same values which govern the conduct of men are at work in the world he lives in, each participates in the other.

With a clearer picture of the community in mind the next chapter continues this account of the village by concentrating in more depth on the principal forms of social organization which regulate Tamang life.

Notes to Chapter 2

- (1) For spelling of Tibetan proper nouns see Glossary, Part II.
- (2) Many alternative spellings of this name are found, including Shabru, Shyabru, Shapru, Sapru and even Syapruk. The spelling adopted here, 'Syabru', seems to represent best the way it is actually pronounced: the 's' is slightly *grooved*, the 'a' is short and the stress falls on the first syllable. Similar variation is found in other local place-names and the same principle of transcription is employed. One informant claimed to derive the name Syabru from the Tibetan zhabs-rus - i.e. foot + bone, but it is difficult to see the significance of such a name unless it refers to the way the ridge on which the village is built extends from the foot of the hill. No-one else was able to confirm this rather fanciful idea for me.
- (3) These events are recorded on the above mentioned pillar at Lhasa and on a boundary stone at Rasuwa Garhi; see also Forbes, 1977: 105 & 126-29). A fuller account of the campaign is given in Stiller (1973: 200ff.). The Chinese counter-attack began in June 1792 and swiftly overran the Gorkhali defences at Kyirong, whereupon the Nepalese troops fell back on Rasuwa Garhi. Here they were overcome by a flanking manoeuvre and fell back again on Syabru. Once more the Chinese outflanked them by crossing the Langtang Kholā higher upriver and coming on them from the rear. Again they fell back on Dhunche, then on Ramche, then on Nuwakot before a truce was agreed.
- (4) Von Führer-Haimendorf has detailed the far-reaching changes which the introduction of the potato brought to the economy of the Sherpas in Solu-Khumbu (1964: 8-11).
- (5) Like Höfer/I could find no trace of the kipat system of tenure which von Führer-Haimendorf reports in the Risingo area further east (1969) (1956).
- (6) An account of this campaign is given in Padma Jung Bahadur Rana (1909: 177ff.). Three regiments, each of 600 men, were sent under the command of General Bam Bahadur (later prime minister himself) and regained the lost territory and occupied Kyirong without difficulty in March, 1855.
- (7) Just how low this density is can be appreciated by comparing it with the figure of 355.06 per square mile for the area designated the Central Development Region (of which Rasuwa district is a part).

Notes cont.

Source: Population Census, 1971 - Abstracts.

(8) Source: Population Census, 1971 - General Characteristics Tables (Table 5).

(9) As Macdonald suggests (1975a:129), the name may derive from the Tibetan, meaning 'people of the frontier', mur being 'at the frontier' and mi being 'man'.

(10) Frank, in his 1969 survey, found a total of only 13,243 Tamangs in Rasuwa district but his figures show them as a higher proportion of the total population of the district - 88.9%, a percentage which seems more likely to reflect the true situation as some members may be more likely to declare themselves speakers of the more prestigious Nepali language in the census returns (Frank, 1974a; 1974b)

(11) A similar history of struggle and conquest is related by the Gurungs, among whom there is also a clan known as the Ghale (Pignède, op cit: 34).

(12) Reproduced by courtesy of David Brown of Connecticut, U.S.A.

(13) As will be seen in Chapter 7 the presence of a number of Tibetan priests among the refugees has had an important effect on the development of Tamang religion.

(14) See Population Census, 1971 - General Characteristics Tables (Table 6) (HMG of Nepal, 1973).

(15) The Ministry of Defence handbook (1965) suggests that one reason for the lack of Tamang recruitment into the Gurkha regiments could be prejudice on the part of orthodox Hindu officers against their beef-eating practices (1965: 113).

(16) The problem of land - and hence food - shortage has become acute throughout the Nepalese hills over the last generation and is everywhere associated with migration and an increased need for cash. For the situation in the Far Western Hills see Caplan, 1972: 24-28 & 40-44.

(17) The pattern of trade has evidently changed over the last 30 years. When Tilman visited the border post at Rasuwa Garhi he was that approximately 5,000 man-loads passed through the frontier annually, in the summer butter being sent up to Kyirong where it was exchanged

Notes cont.

pound for pound with salt which was then carried over to Helambu to be exchanged for rice which was taken up to Kyirong in the winter when butter was scarce (Tilman, op cit).

(18) Cf the Tibetan proverb - "the neighbour is nearer than a kind man living far away" (Das, 1976: 485).

(19) This association with the relics of the Guru's body is reminiscent of the Indian tantric tradition of pīṭha or pilgrimage centres mythologically associated with the place where a limb of the goddess Saṅgi fell to earth when her body was being chopped up by the gods (Bharati, 1965: 90).

(20) Recent scholarship has identified at least two other beyul in Nepal: the skyid-mo lung in Kutang in western Nepal (Aris, 1975) and the khen-pa lung near the Arun river in eastern Nepal (Reinhard, 1978).

(21) Clarke (1980b) dates the founding of most Helambu gompas from the 18th to the 19th centuries. The pattern of religious development further north in the Langtang region appears to be very similar to his description. Indeed his informants suggested that the Sermo lineage of Gortshaling in Helambu was responsible for the founding of Syabru gumpa in about 1800 AD. Unfortunately I cannot corroborate this, but it seems more likely that it refers to Syabu Bēsi (Wangbi) gumpa. Syabru gumpa since the 1850s has been in the possession of the present Karmapa lineage when it was taken over (? founded) by one of the descendants of the founder of Mang-zhe gumpa.

(22) On Saṅkrānti see Anderson (1971: 223ff) and Macdonald (1975b: 275ff).

CHAPTER THREE

SOCIETY AND CHANGE

Until the re-establishment of the powers of the monarchy in 1951 Nepal, as is often pointed out, was an isolated, closed society; unusually in the Asian context it had never known colonial domination. The impression one has of Syabru during this period is predominantly that of a traditional society largely turned in on itself, pursuing its own way of life with little reference to changes of government or interest in wider political events. This is not to say that it was a static or changeless society - the previous chapter has indicated the local impact of a number of events - nor one altogether ignorant of the outside world. Living near a major trade route and frequently travelling themselves people looked to Lhasa and Kathmandu as dual cultural and political centres and were at least aware of ongoing developments there. In more recent times Syabru people have been to India in search of work, while of the two who joined the Gurkhas one fought in Italy and the other in Malaya. Nevertheless these contacts do not seem to have had much effect on village life; the pace of change was measured, the impact of the outside world muted.

In the modern period since 1951 this has altered dramatically, not only in Syabru but throughout the country. With successive governments committed to modernisation and development, and to securing recognition in the world community, new values are being aggressively promulgated through various media, while the control of the central administration over once remote communities is being tightened. At the same time problems such as land scarcity and overpopulation are creating their own stresses and strains in rural communities. In the face of these pressures from within and without the pattern of social life is changing in a variety of ways.

This chapter examines the social structure of a Tamang village including a number of features common to Tamang society generally - the organisation of clan, descent group and household, the system

of inheritance, marriage practices and divorce, and the pattern of secular authority. Attention is drawn to similarities and differences between Tamang and other Himalayan societies. Finally, various ways in which these institutions are undergoing change, and the principal agents of change in village life, are briefly discussed.

Clan, lineage and fictive kin

As a group or 'tribe' the Tamangs in the area under consideration are highly endogamous; there are no cases of marriages across caste boundaries (partly, perhaps, because the demographic pattern limits the possibility), nor with other non-Tamang groups except for the few marriages with Sherpani women from Helambu and the rare case of a Tibetan marrying a Tamang wife; no more than 6-7% of marriages are mixed in this way. Moreover, unlike say the Limbus who seek brides from distant regions (Jones & Jones, 1976b: 128-9), Tamangs marry in their natal village or a neighbouring village not more than a day's walk away (excepting again the case of women from Helambu).

Within Tamang society the most general classification is formed by the division into a number of named patrilineal clans, known usually by the Nepali terms jat or thar. The clans are not in any sense corporate groups: members do not hold land in common (although they may once have done so), do not worship together, participate at one another's funerals or necessarily interact in any way purely as a result of their clan membership. Nevertheless the clan is conceptually important in identifying an individual and linking him directly with the earliest Tamang ancestors (although the link is putative since no genealogical relationship can be shown); from a practical point of view the main function of the clan is regulating marriage alliances.

Members of each clan claim common descent from a single ancestor believed to have come from Tibet. These ancestors were themselves descended ultimately from a single man, Lhaki Dorje, through three families - those of Lhajin Dorje, Mangoli and Dongchembu (1) - who in turn gave rise to the original eighteen clans (hruisang cyopke) (2). According to some accounts (Santabir Lama, 1976; Macdonald, 1975a) the clans are also each linked with a particular place or ancestral home. Nowadays there are many more than 18 clan; over 40 names having been recorded so far (3), although some

names are interchangeable, such as Rambot and Thokra or Rumba and Kartemba. New clans result from a slow but continuous process of fission, in some cases giving rise to larger exogamous units - 'brother-clans' such as the Kra-Thing and Me-Thing, and possibly also from immigration by members of other tribes who in time become accepted as Tamangs. In addition to their links with a common ancestor members of the clan are associated with a clan deity known as the birth god (ke lha), or in the Ānkhu Kholā as the lineage god (kulgi lha). There are substantial differences among and even within clans as to the manner in which the worship of the birth god is performed, some of which are examined in the next chapter, but in all cases it is the individual household which is responsible for carrying out the ceremony.

Distribution of the clans varies markedly from one village to another. As we have seen, some clans are associated with particular areas of the village and a particular order of arrival in the myths of village settlement. Each village contains members of from 6 to 10 natal clans, plus women from a variety of other clans from nearby villages. Thus in Syabru the natal clans in descending order of size are : Teba, Karmapa, Shangba, Thokra, Singden, Lopcen, Waiba and Pidako. By contrast in nearby Bharku they are: Thokra, Flōn, Ghale, Nekhor, Shangba, Rumba and Bumjhen. In Syabru the Teba clan (not one of the first arrivals) has grown to be overwhelmingly dominant in terms of population and control of land; the Tebas form over one third of the local population and control two-fifths of the land (see Table 3).

Among the Gurungs who have a similar system of patrilineal clans there is a clear internal hierarchy, the four superior clans (cārjāt) forming one larger endogamous sub-group, while the remaining clans form another endogamous grouping (sorajāt); relations between the two sub-groups are characterized by cleavage and conflict (Messerschmidt, 1976a). There is no such clear-cut hierarchization of the Tamang clans although there is a tendency for three of them to be considered somewhat superior to the remainder. These are the Ghales and the Thokras by virtue of their superior origins as kings and ministers before the time of Tamang settlement, and the Karmapas who have a strong religious association, bearing the name of a sect of Tibetan Buddhism and being in fact the clan from which many of the

Clan name	Male	Female	Total	% of total males	% of total land held
Teba	80	65	145	39.5	40.9
Karmapa	29	29	58	14.3	16.8
Shangba	26	25	51	12.8	10.2
Thokra	22	27	49	10.9	13.1
Singden	15	13	28	7.4	6.4
Lopcen	10	9	19	4.9	3.8
Sherpa (Helambu)	5	12	17	2.4	1.3
Waiba	5	5	10	2.4	3.8
Pidako	7	2	9	3.4	3.7
Tibetan	2	-	2	1.0	-
Ghale (Dhunchhe)	-	2	2	-	-
Dongba	-	2	2	-	-
Plön (Bharku)	-	1	1	-	-
Chusanga (Langtang)	-	1	1	-	-
Unknown	1	3	4	0.5	-
TOTAL	202	196	398	100.0	100.0

Table 3 - Clans and landholdings in Syabru and the hamlets

lamas are drawn (4). Comparing the number of men in each clan and the amount of land they control (Table 3) shows some indication that the Karmapas and Thokras own a disproportionate share of the land, although not enough to be statistically significant. (Comparing the number of clan households with their landholdings in fact shows the advantage to lie with the Tebas at the expense of the Thokras and Karmapas.) There is also a tendency for the Ghale, Karmapa and Thokra clans to intermarry. Out of a sample of 34 marriages made by men of the latter two clans, 12 or 35 $\frac{1}{3}$ % were with women from one of the other two clans (5).

Individual clans are completely exogamous units. Intermarriage or sexual relations within the clan or between members of brother clans is forbidden. I found no indication that such relations ever did take place and people regarded it as unheard of. Such behaviour, if discovered, would be grounds for instant expulsion from the village.

Of more significance than the clan in village interaction is the local descent group consisting of those members of a clan who can trace known genealogical links to a recent ancestor usually no more

than 3 or 4 generations back. People rationalize that the lineages of a particular clan were once all related but that the links have since been forgotten (and indeed, villagers keep no genealogical records and show little interest in recalling their ancestry), so that the other lineages are less close than 'our people'. In the case of some of the smaller clans in the village, such as the Pidako and the Waiba, local descent group and clan are for all practical purposes co-extensive, whereas the Teba are composed of 4 lineages and the Karmapa of 3.

Members of the local descent group are bound together not only by blood ties but by their common interests in property and land for all the men are potentially heirs (pha-shi dopta) following the death of one of their number. Ordinarily the closest relations are between brothers and their father (pha-myung) for a man's sons inherit equal shares in the property. However if a man has neither sons nor adoptive sons his brothers are next in line of inheritance and then his brothers' sons. Counterbalancing lineage members' rights as heirs is their duty to provide for the funeral of a dead kinsman, a highly expensive and elaborate ritual lasting several weeks (see Chapter 8). Those who actually receive the inheritance foot the bill for this occasion but all lineage members attend the various funerary rites and play a part in the preparations. They do not however suffer any more pollution (shi-tip) than casual mourners at the funeral and do not observe any subsequent period of dietary restrictions, etc. Lineage members also play a part in the weddings of kinsmen by carrying the bride back from her natal village and by making larger than average cash gifts to the couple. Various annual festivals, including Tibetan New Year in February and Dasain in October, stress the renewal and strengthening of ties between members of the group. Lineage members entertain one another and their affines to lavish feasts of specially prepared foods in which expensive ingredients such as eggs, rice and butter have been used; large quantities of beer (ningu) and spirits (N - raksi) are prepared in advance and the round of visiting continues for several days until all obligations have been discharged.

The usual pattern of inheritance is for sons to claim their share of the land when they are in their mid-twenties, a few years after their marriage; the youngest son continues to live in the

family house until his parents' death when he takes over the house and the remaining portion of land. In some cases, however, family resources are insufficient to permit all the sons to build their own houses and they may decide to partition the existing family house by simply building a dividing wall and separate entrance. Their cooking arrangements, like their financial affairs, remain separate but there is usually a high degree of cooperation between them on their work tasks and a strong emotional bond. On the other hand, half-brothers who do not share the same father and consequently have no common property interests may exhibit few signs of closeness to one another.

The exception to the usual pattern of inheritance is the case of a man who has no sons. Rather than seeing his property go to his brothers or, more commonly, because he cannot afford to lose the labour of his daughter, he effectively adopts his son-in-law in the type of uxorilocal marriage which is also found in Tibetan, Sherpa and Gurung societies. Amongst the Tamangs this type of marriage is known as mā gomma. The son-in-law renounces his rights in his natural father's property, and the corresponding obligation to perform his funeral, and acquires the same rights and duties vis-à-vis his adoptive father; he does not change his clan. Although uncommon there is no indication that the mā gomma arrangement is looked down on - in fact people see the positive advantages in the case of a son who has little patrimony to look forward to, or who may have to wait many years before receiving his full share.

Despite the relaxed attitude to pre-marital sex the incidence of illegitimate children (pro) is low, probably in part due to the delayed subfertility of women who do not produce their first child until the modal age of 23, usually some years after they have married, in part because marriages will be arranged before the birth of such a child. This is just as well for the position of the illegitimate child is particularly insecure, subject to the whims of his real or step-father. Where the child is male and the father is unknown the position is even worse, for the child has no clan or lineage membership and no title to property; when he grows up he may have no alternative but to work as a servant in someone else's household. Unlike the Gurung child who has equal title with his legitimate brothers (Pignède, op cit: 268), an illegitimate Tamang depends on getting recognition either from his natural father or from his adoptive

father (i.e. mother's husband); he then has the normal rights and duties of a son vis-à-vis whichever man recognizes him.

In addition to the ordinary ties of kinship most villagers have fictive kinship bonds with a wide range of people both within the village and in other parts of the region and the country. The relationship - not restricted to Tamangs but found throughout Nepal - is always between same-sex friends who do not use personal names but refer to one another as mit (N) in the case of men and mitini if women; it is quite usual to have 3 or 4 mit and cases of 15 or 20 are by no means unknown. The paired couples stand to one another in the relationship of bond-brothers or bond-sisters; they refer to one another's kinsmen as if they were their own by the correct kin terms and thus are prohibited from marrying the siblings of fictive kin; some people also thought that the children of bond-brothers or -sisters were prohibited from marrying one another, although there was not complete agreement about this. There is no bar to establishing fictive kin bonds between members of different ethnic groups or castes.

Whilst the great majority of fictive kinship bonds are forged purely out of friendship and without any ulterior motive between people who work together or meet on pilgrimages or trading trips, there is no doubt that they also serve as a useful network of relationships in an area where travel is frequent but owing to village endogamy people have few true kinsmen in other parts of the region. With a wide circle of mit they can be sure of finding accommodation and hospitality in other villages and of having contacts who will facilitate the setting up of various trading deals (6).

The relationship is initiated by an informal party given in the home of one of the participants or an intermediary. The two friends are seated together at one end of the room behind a low table on which are placed a brass platter for donations and wooden jars of liquor, their rims decorated with butter, together with a ritual implement used in a great variety of Tamang ceremonies - the dadar (Tib. nda' dar), consisting of a metal trident swathed in strips of coloured cloth; in the present instance it is a sort of good luck symbol, acting by drawing the attention of the gods to the rite and getting them to witness the relationship and protect it from harmful influences. A meal is prepared and after the assembled company has eaten and

drunk each guest in turn presents the couple with a white scarf and a gift of 5 or 10 rupees and wishes them good luck. The rest of the day is spent in singing, joking and drinking. (In some ways the ceremony is highly reminiscent of a wedding (v. i.) which is not inappropriate, since the two occasions have a similar result - the establishment of alliances between families.)

Kinship terminology and cross-cousin marriage

As has been seen, two categories of kin are forbidden to intermarry: ego may not marry a member of his own clan or the female siblings of his fictive kinsmen, regardless of whether there is any known blood relationship. To these two must be added a third proscription of a different type against ego marrying his mother's sister's daughter, i.e. matrilineal parallel cousins, a rule which is the obverse of a preference for bilateral cross-cousin marriage. In the event that such marriages did regularly take place the MZD would also be a father's brother's daughter and hence already excluded by the rule of clan exogamy (see Fig 3), but even where this is not the case such a marriage is prohibited.

Although marriage with a cross-cousin is regarded as 'a good thing' it is not specifically enjoined and in fact rarely takes place between true cross-cousins. Out of a sample of 74 marriages only 6.8% were of this type with the majority being patrilineal. If the definition is expanded to include 'classificatory' cross-cousins this figure rises to 13.6%. Thus the rate for this type of marriage, called 'statistical' by Fox (1967: 200) because the effect of demographic and other constraints prevents it ever doing more than approaching its ideal, is rather low. However, if we broaden the picture to encompass the type he terms 'systematic', involving the direct exchange of women between lineages and clans, the figure immediately trebles. A further 8.1% of marriages involved sister exchange while 17.6% were with women of the MB's or FZH's clan. Hence the total number of marriages involving some sort of reciprocal exchange comes to 39.7% of the total sample of 74. The only figure we have for comparison is provided by Höfer who remarks, "I would estimate the rate of cross-cousin marriages about 30% of all the marriages recorded by me" (1969: 25). But he does not specify what degree of classificatory kinship this figure may encompass, although the implication seems to be that he is talking only of true cross-cousins.

There appear to be a number of contributory factors to the rela-

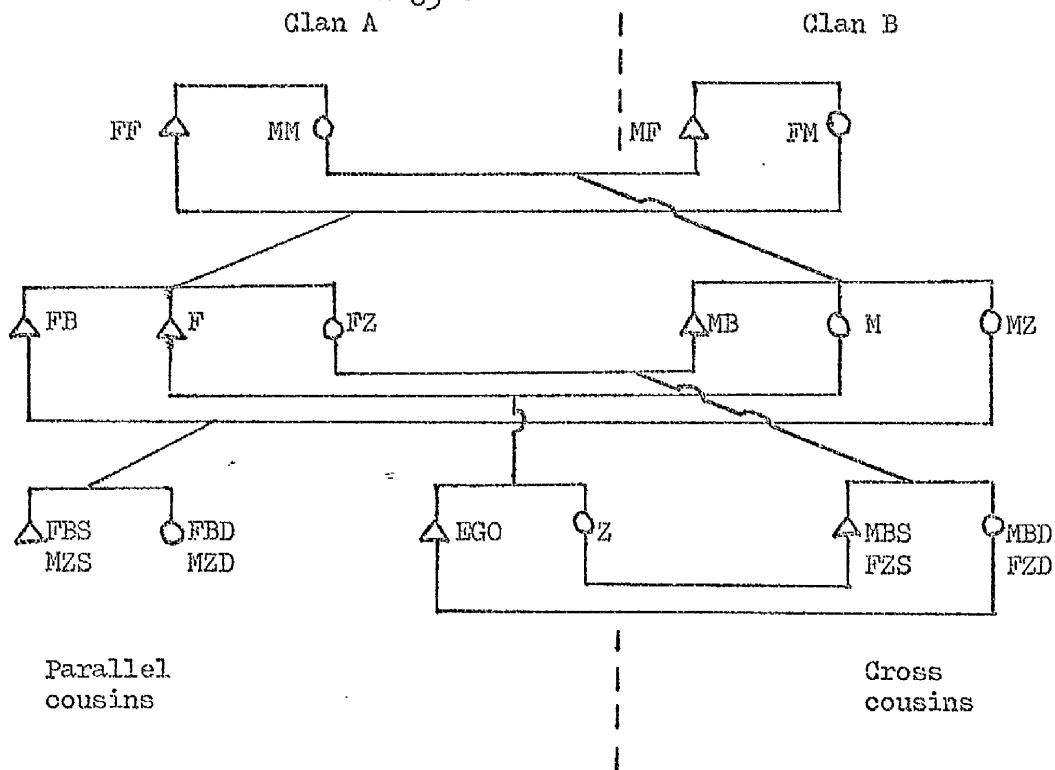


Fig. 3 - Cross and parallel cousins

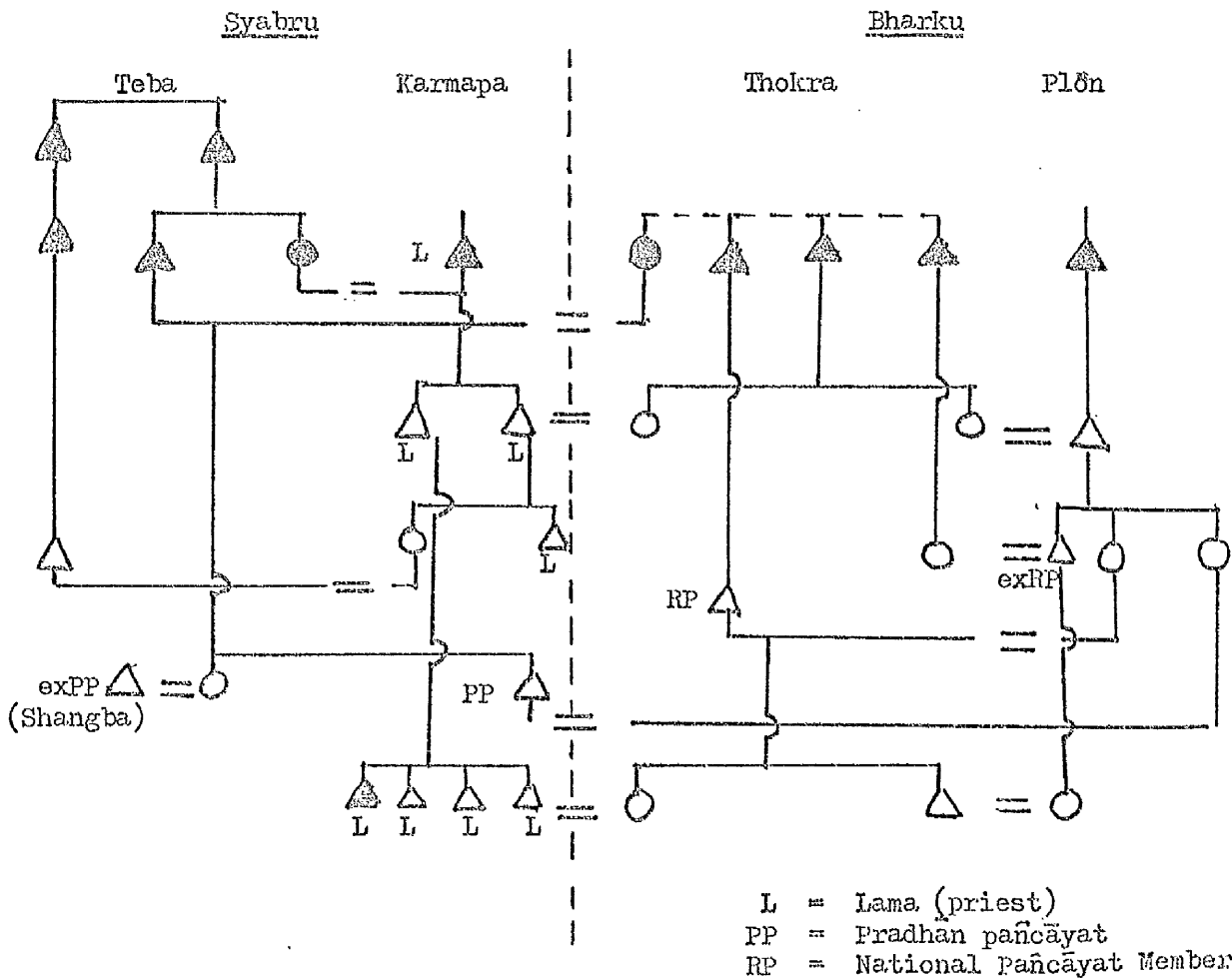


Fig. 4 - Reciprocal marriages linking clans in Syabru and Bharku

tive paucity of such 'statistical' cross-cousin marriages in Syabru. These include the gradual supplanting of arranged marriages by elopement or by marriages of mutual affection, the very high divorce rate which suggests that such marriages would not in any case endure very long, and the imbalance in the size of the clans which means that the largest must take wives wherever it can find them.

Nevertheless there are limited pockets of cross-cousin exchange relationships of several generations' depth to be found. Where Fig 3 illustrates the ideal of cross-cousin marriage, Fig 4 depicts the more complex reality. Greatly simplified though the diagram is, it gives an idea of the web of interconnections established by marriage over a period of three generations, in this case connecting the two villages of Syabru and Bharku and linking four of the clans: the Tebas and the Karmapas of Syabru (or, more accurately, a single lineage of each), and the Thokras and Plöns of Bharku. What makes this example particularly interesting is that the exchanges clearly have a political function, for they join the lineage of lamas - who have a high religious status but little economic power or direct political influence - with the holders of political office, who have power but lack the legitimation of religious status. Both sides thus appear to gain from the alliance, although judging by the very high bride-wealth payments asked and received for the daughters of the 'political' families, it is they who are in the commanding position.

Kinship terminology is fully consistent with a system of cross-cousin marriage (see Fig 5). FB and MZH are called by a single term, as are FBW and MZ. Again their children - who may not intermarry - are called by the same terms as ego's own brothers and sisters. The same equation of terms is found between MB and FZH, and between MBW and FZ, these being potentially one's parents-in-law. Their children, the marriageable cross-cousins, are known by the compound term samdhi-sha, sha meaning 'flesh' and samdhi from the Nepali where it means the parents-in-law of one's son or daughter - a rather cumbersome way of expressing the relationship.

Other significant terms are ken for WF, shume for WM and syangbo for WB. Older and younger uncles, aunts etc. are distinguished by the terms theba and changba respectively. Ajo (elder brother) and ashang (MB) are also used as respectful terms of address to older men of one's own generation and the ascending generation respectively, personal

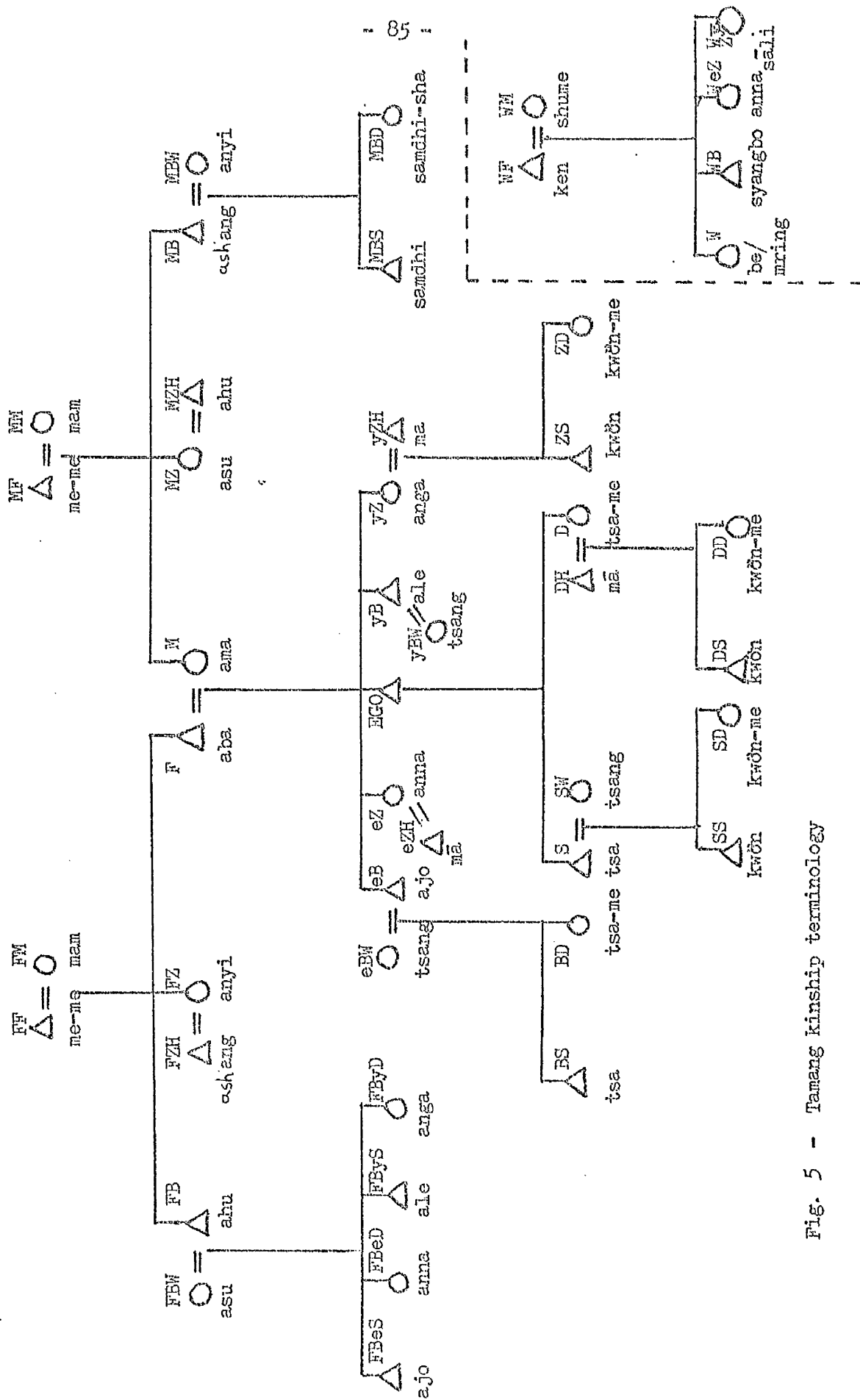


Fig. 5 - Tamang kinship terminology

names being rarely employed and, in the case of dead parents, completely tabooed. It has been suggested that the use of the same term for brother's wife and daughter-in-law "does not appear fully consistent with kinship behaviour" (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956: 171) since the former is a potential mate under the rule of leviratic marriage but the latter is not. However the terminology is paralleled by the use of mā for both sister's husband and son-in-law. I think the consistency is to be found in the Tamang view of the women called tsang not as potential marriage partners but as affinal women who have married into the clan. They are all effectively classificatory 'daughters-in-law' to Ego, a view born out by their specific roles (and that of sons-in-law) at the funeral of Ego. It is only comparatively rarely that there is a clash between the role of brother's wife as 'daughter-in-law' and as marriage partner.

Tamang kinship practice and terminology is comparable in type with that of neighbouring groups such as the Helambu Sherpa (Goldstein, op cit), the Tibetan speakers of Langtang (Hall, op cit) and the Gurungs (Messerschmidt, 1976a). It is unlike that of the Tibetans who regard the practice of cross-cousin marriage as incestuous and who prohibit marriage within a bilateral kindred extending to seven generations, and of the Solu-Khumbu Sherpas who have a system of exogamous clans like the Tamangs but do not permit marriage with the MBD. Bilateral cross-cousin marriage is undoubtedly something which the Tamangs feel marks them off as different from these peoples and from the Hindu population in Nepal and which contributes to their self-identification as a tribe. (It may also be a factor in the relative absence of hierarchy among the clans: according to Gaborieau (1978: 124), it is a system whereby "on aboutit ainsi à des échanges plus serrés au niveau local et on évite la création entre alliés de relations asymétriques et hiérarchisées.....".)

The household

Recent studies have emphasised the importance of the household as a political, economic and ritual unit (Aziz, 1974; 1978; Jones & Jones, op cit). This is equally true of the Tamangs for, although it is clan and lineage which define who a man is in jural terms, the daily conduct of his life revolves around the household - the group of people who form a common unit of production and consumption even though they do not necessarily live under the same roof at all times.

Although dependent in practice on the mutual aid of other households, each unit is ideologically very much a self-sufficient entity with its own residence and its individually owned land and property. Each household must take its own decisions as to how best to deploy its members' energies to maximize production, and there is little sympathy for those who fall by the wayside through bad luck or bad management. Conversely, rich and successful households are the object of a mixture of envy and admiration by others and rank high in the status hierarchy of the village. The household is also the major centre of ritual; with the exception of the monthly temple ceremony and three or four calendrical festivals all rituals are sponsored by individual households. A number of these rituals contain either as their main purpose or as a secondary element the theme of the protection of the household against the penetration of bad luck or the expulsion of evil forces.

The process of household formation begins three or four years after a man has married, by which time it will be seen that the marriage is well-established and that children may be expected. He goes to his father and asks for his share of the inheritance - a plot of land, a house if it can be afforded, and a few cattle. In the early years he is still heavily dependent on the assistance of his father and elder brothers and may try to build his house near theirs; but at the same time he is building up a network of mutual co-operation with various other households, particularly his neighbours, affines and mit brothers. Infants remain in the care of their mother, sleeping with her and accompanying her to the fields or about her other tasks in a basket on her back, but by the age of about eight children begin to play a small part in the affairs of the household, being sent out to herd the sheep and goats, fetch water or watch the house while the parents are away. By the age of 12 a boy begins to wear the heavy curved knife (khukri - N) which is used for all manner of tasks from splitting wood to peeling potatoes and which is a symbol of adulthood; he is now old enough to accompany his father on trading trips to Kyirong and Trisuli and to undertake more responsible tasks. A girl learns to cook, weave and look after her younger brothers and sisters, so freeing her mother for more work outside the home.

Although authority ultimately rests with the head of the household the general atmosphere is one of relaxed co-operation and intim-

acy among the members; wives have a say in the running of the household and, where their husband is a weak man, may become the driving force behind him; some who are widowed young may become the effective head of the household and exercise considerable control over even grown sons. Children, although respectful towards all adults, are treated in an easy-going manner by both parents, rarely disciplined and scarcely ever beaten. However they do not appear to have any special role as children and are not encouraged to develop individual skills or talents to any extent; their games are few and unimaginative, consisting largely of imitating the tasks they see adults performing; it seems as though childhood is mainly a waiting period until the child is old enough to contribute to the affairs of the household. The strength of household ties is celebrated and renewed in a variety of calendrical festivals which have been touched on in the previous chapter. Dasain and Tihār with their exchanges of gifts between household members and the two Sankrāntis in July and January with their family feasts are outstanding examples of these occasions. While these events stress intra-household bonds others are concerned with repelling extra-household threats: the New Year, the 'birth-god' ceremony, all shamanic rituals and certain Buddhist rituals in cases of illness are of this type.

As the children move into their teens and the eldest sons marry and bring in wives the household reaches the maximum point in its expansionary phase and the height of its productivity. With the labour of the additional women there are enough members for some to live with the cattle while others work the fields in different locations. Again one sees how crucial household size is to the successful operation of its affairs, for however much labour is demanded from its mutual-aid group of neighbours and kin must be repaid in kind - obviously easier the more members there are. Those who cannot honour labour commitments in this way must pay for assistance at the rate of Rs.2.50 per day plus at least one meal for each worker.

But before long the tensions between the wife and her daughters-in-law, coupled with the sons' own desires for independence, lead to the fission of the household and the recommencement of the process. As sons and daughters leave to found their own households the man gradually divests himself of his property and his worldly concerns. By the age of about 60 he is no longer fit for heavy work and his thoughts are turning increasingly to religious matters. If a widower

he will complete the division of his property and move in with a son or daughter, earning his keep by weaving bamboo basketry for sale or for the use of the household. Although universally respected as a me-me (grandfather, ancestor) his voice is no longer listened to in the village councils and he has no further authority in the household. Generally he is content to leave such matters to younger men while he concerns himself with his memories of the past and the fate of his soul in the future.

The break-up of the household as sons and daughters marry and move away is by no means regarded as satisfactory and it is often a time of bitterness and tension between household members. A few resist the pattern, either by delaying the handover of the portion of the inheritance, or by the expedient of brothers continuing to live together as a joint family, sharing the house, the land and the work. However, the Table of Household Composition (Table 4) confirms that over half the population of Syabru does live in simple or nuclear households consisting of parents and their children. The most common other arrangements are parents together with children and daughters-in-law and parents, children and their own widowed parent (there seems to be little preference as to whether it is the husband's or wife's parent who joins the household). Various atypical arrangements include childless couples, the unmarried, joint families of brothers, the case of a man and his wife left bringing up their grandchildren, and three households where the woman has been widowed or deserted but continues as household head herself.

	<u>Household type</u>	<u>No. of house- holds</u>	<u>Persons</u>
1.	Parents and their children	41	210
2.	Parents, their children, their sons' wives and children	6	48
3.	Parents, their children, and widowed parent of H or W	7	48
4.	Man and wife (with other relative)	8	23
5.	Single man (with other relative)	4	6
6.	Brothers, their wives and children	4	44
7.	Mother (and MM) and children	3	13
8.	Man and wife and grandchildren	1	6
	TOTAL	74	398

Table 4 - Household composition, Syabru and hamlets

Marriage and divorce

Just as the household is usually based on the simple or nuclear family, marriage is normally monogamous; one does not find the great variety of plural marriage forms which characterize Tibetan society. The most striking difference is that among the Tamangs polyandry is completely forbidden, although several informants - who are of course familiar with the system from their Tibetan contacts - frankly stated that they considered it a superior arrangement for it keeps family wealth together rather than dissipating it (7). Polygynous marriages are, or were, permitted but account for less than 3% of the total; this can be ascribed to several reasons: the expense involved in taking a second wife and perhaps of establishing her in a second home if she quarrels with the first wife, the irregularity of this type of union in the eyes of the better educated and the higher castes and, nowadays, its illegality. The most usual reason for polygynous marriage is when the first wife proves barren or incapable of producing sons; sororal polygyny seems to work best for the sisters are well-used to co-operating at the various household tasks and are more likely to live together amicably.

Marriages may be contracted in a variety of ways - by mutual agreement between the families concerned, by elopement or love matches and by capture. Although customs are changing in this respect, still the most common form is by arrangement (tal-sing (? or tan-sing) bāma). Occasionally the agreement may be reached when the children are still infants but more usually their parents wait until they are between 16 and 20 and allow them to participate in the decision. The negotiations are opened by the process of cār-dān⁽⁸⁾ in which the prospective suitor, his father, other patrilineal relatives and an intermediary visit the home of the girl's father. To him they offer a white scarf and a flask of liquor as shel-kar (8) - the offering which accompanies any request or which is given to an honoured personage. Discussions centre on the question of the brideprice and dowry which will be given, the young man's prospects and the astrologically determined suitability of the match. Should the negotiations succeed (ri-ji) a date is fixed for the marriage ceremony (bāma) and the bargain sealed by return prestations of alcohol from the girl's father. However, even this does not guarantee that the wedding will actually take place. To the extreme mortification of one young man, Dawa, he arrived at the bride's house on the appointed day

in a village two days' walk away, with his wedding party dressed in all their finery, to carry the bride back to her new home, only to find that the match had been called off. It was not clear whether the girl had really changed her mind or her parents had pressured her to do so having decided that the brideprice was insufficient or that a better offer could be obtained elsewhere. Instead of the triumphal return to Syabru which had been expected, Dawa and his party returned very shamefaced by night and his father, hurriedly casting around other local families with eligible daughters, secured another bride within a couple of days who was married quietly with little ceremony. Negotiations can thus be completed very rapidly when the need arises and the early stages of the marriage process telescoped together; by contrast Sherpa marriage arrangements seem to be dragged out over a number of years (Ortner, op.cit.: 21-2).

The other principal types of marriage do not involve the initial negotiations but subsequently follow a similar pattern. These are mil-sing marriages founded on the mutual affection of the couple and bal-sing, or marriage by capture, which is supposedly illegal but still takes place from time to time. Many people, not only the young, are of the opinion that mil-sing is the best of the three types, being recommended by the government and having the greatest chance of success. Nevertheless, if there is some chance of the parents rejecting the match it may be necessary for the couple to elope, going either to another village or hiding in the forests for a few days to convince people of the seriousness of their intentions. Unless the opposition is extraordinarily strong the parents will generally capitulate at this and give the marriage their blessing. The rather rare marriage by capture involves the young man and a gang of youths waiting until the girl is alone in the forest or the fields and then pouncing on her and dragging her off. Far from being merely a ritualized courtship procedure this can degenerate into a serious battle with a girl who is genuinely unwilling. In one case in which several people were injured the outraged girl and her family took the participants to the district court at Dhunche and demanded compensation for the attack.

Formerly marriages were often arranged around the ages of 14 or 15 but nowadays the age of first marriage is often much later. This is partly the result of government laws and propaganda, partly because of the increasing independence of young women, a number of whom re-

main unmarried into their 20s and even claim they do not wish to get married at all. With improving prospects for earning their own income (e.g. through weaving) coupled with the reluctance of some parents to lose a productive member of the household this stance is now quite feasible.

An essential feature of the marriage is the exchange of gifts and money which takes place. Following the prestations of the betrothal comes the transfer of the brideprice (buzau)(9), handed over to the girl's father when the bride is collected. Where the two families are of roughly equal status the amount given varies between Rs.100 and Rs.500, the exact figure being reached by mutual haggling, taking into account such factors as a man having many sons and being unable to pay out very much for a wife for each, or that a girl has been married several times before. Where the marriage is hypogamous (with a woman from a rich or high status family) the brideprice may be very much larger, up to Rs.2,000. Ordinarily the money is provided by the groom's father but in the case of a second or third marriage he may well decide that he has provided all he can afford to and it is up to the son to pay some or all of it himself. The brideprice goes to the bride's father but, if the marriage breaks up in the first few years, it is in principle returnable; more often than not, though, it is found to have been 'eaten up' in the meantime, its non-return leading to bad feeling between the two families.

The second major component of the gifts from the groom's family is a complete set of new clothes (ba-weh) for the bride. Costing several hundred rupees this is a fully comprehensive outfit comprising hat, blouse, skirt, backcloth (syama), shoes, etc. The bride also receives from her own father a dowry (nor-kal; Tib. nor-skal) usually consisting of jewellery - earrings, necklaces of coral, golden locket, heavy silver bracelets - but occasionally also including clothes, cooking utensils or a few sheep and goats. Should the marriage break up these remain her property.

In addition to these gifts cash presents are made by all the guests at the wedding feast, each household contributing between Rs.5 and Rs.30. The total take is divided into three parts, two parts going to the groom's family to help offset the costs of the party, one part to the bride's family. The extent of each guest's generosity and the total amount collected is a matter of keen interest to all the participants; at one large wedding where the collection

came to Rs.650 one man who had been married recently was heard complaining that at his wedding he'd spent Rs.700 on the party but had only received 300 in gifts.

The wedding ceremony itself is simple although long drawn out. The groom and his retinue collect the bride from her home which she departs tearfully, particularly if she is going to another village. She is accompanied by her own family and a girlfriend but it is the groom and his kinsmen who must physically carry her back, no matter how long the journey. On arrival at her new home she changes into the new wedding outfit. Meanwhile preparations for the feast are under way and when all is ready a rifle shot announces the start to the guests who have been waiting nearby. As they arrive they are seated in order of precedence on mats spread out round the courtyard - first the wife-giving lineage, then the head of the pañcāyat and other local notables, then the senior members of the groom's lineage; as at all other communal occasions women are seated separately from the men and are not fed until they have eaten. After the guests - 200 or more in the case of a big wedding - have been plied with food and drink, the bride and bridegroom are brought out from the inner room where they have been waiting and seated on rugs. Grain is scattered over them, they are garlanded with flowers, their heads anointed with butter, white scarves are presented and a ceremonial arrow (da-dar) set up before them. A lama reads a short protective blessing from one of the holy books - the only religious component of the ceremony - and the bride's father or other elderly man makes a long rambling speech on the duties and responsibilities of the couple. Formerly this was the function of the tamba (cf. Santabir Lama, 1976), a poet and genealogist who played an extensive part in life-crisis rituals, recounting the lengthy prose-poems known as hvai. One untranslated wedding hvai runs to 76 lines (Tashi Phinjo Lama & Iman Singh Lama, 1976: 17-19). In it the groom's side opens the proceedings by declaring, "We are Tamang people; we may be poor but we wish to behave properly" and demanding, "You must tell us how the name of Tamang came about and how our ancestors brought us from Tibet". To which the tamba on behalf of the bride's side answers, "Our name is good; our line is good. We were a military people who came from Tibet. We have brought our gods and our culture from Tibet" and goes on to recount the journey from Tibet via Jhārlang and Setang (Timure) under the leadership of lhake Dorje and how he gave the names to the 18 clans and said which could intermarry.

Nowadays there seems to be no formal office of tamba and the hvai are in danger of disappearing. One man, however, continues to act as a sort of master of ceremonies at the wedding, although he does not recount the genealogies. He calls upon the guests to witness the marriage and to make their gifts, holding up each as it is given and naming the donor, to which the audience cries 'ordiche, ordiche!' ('bravo, thank you!'), then placing it before the couple. Meanwhile the bride is almost prostrate with nerves and embarrassment, supported by her girl companion, weeping and hiding her face in her scarves and robes - even though the wedding may have been proceeded by an elopement and the couple are plainly very happy with each other; the groom ignores his bride and simpers bashfully at being the focus of all this attention. As the day wears on and the guests get drunker, singing and dancing begin (unless there is a death ceremony pending in the village) and continue until nightfall.

On the wedding night or within a week thereafter a return visit known as bāle shempa is made to the wife's parents (ken shume) by the couple and the groom's family, bearing with them a basket filled with bread fried in butter together with rice and wine. Here they receive hospitality in return and a rather smaller party for close friends and kin is held.

The couple now live for the first three or four years with the man's family, often until the first children are born; it is not until a son and heir is produced that the marriage is firmly established and indeed there is a strong chance that it will break up before this time. The new wife has to adapt herself to a strange household, possibly even to unfamiliar speech if she is a Tibetan or Sherpa speaker, to get along with her mother-in-law and to learn to cooperate in the daily tasks. One of the few men to marry a woman from Langtang village, when asked why he subsequently divorced her, said quite bluntly, "She wasn't used to our way of doing things". During this initial period the young woman may make frequent visits to her natal home - too frequent and there will be gossip that she is not settling down well, not integrating properly into village life. Perhaps for this reason there is a strong preference for marrying into one's natal village or a village very close by. 61% of all current marriages follow this pattern in Syabru, with 29 women having been brought in from other villages; however, only 12 Syabru women have married outside their own village. The places of origin

<u>Village of origin</u>	<u>No. of women</u>
Brābal	7
Malemchi/Tarke Ghyang	7
Timure	5
Bharku	3
Dhunche	3
Syabru Bēsi	1
Thuman	1
Langtang	1
Gompagang	1
TOTAL	29

Table 5 - Origin of women marrying Syabru men

of incoming women are rarely more than a day's walk away (Table 5). The most striking exception to this rule is the number of women from Malemchi and Tarke Ghyang, large Helambu villages, who have married into Syabru. This appears to be purely a one-way flow of women and no evidence could be found that any women from Syabru have ever married in Helambu. Although many people have kin in Helambu the opportunities for meeting them are virtually restricted to the Gosāikund festival in August (when most of the marriages are also arranged) for except in the summer months the connecting pass is difficult or impossible to negotiate. The lot of the Sherpa women from Helambu is not a very happy one, for most if not all of them are considered to be witches (N - boksi) - seemingly a classic case of outsiders becoming scapegoats.

In fact many marriages do not survive the tensions of the early years. The man, still in his teens or early twenties, has little inclination to end his liaisons with other girlfriends; the woman misses her own family, finds life under the thumb of her mother-in-law restrictive and may have difficulty in adapting from the free and easy flirtatiousness of a young girl to the more modest behaviour expected of a married woman. Between one in three marriages for women and one in two for men ends in divorce (kha-be-pa), with a few men having had as many as four or five wives (10). Various reasons are given for the break-up including incompatibility, the emigration of the spouse, and adultery. If the couple are childless it is not regarded as a particularly serious matter, but complications arise particularly when there are sons for the man's lineage is unwilling

to lose its new recruits while the children's mother may not wish to be parted from them.

Jones & Jones (op cit) who have made an extensive study of marriage and divorce among the Limbu of eastern Nepal view marriage stability as a function of the woman's economic independence coupled with her dissatisfaction with the marriage. The vulnerability of the marriage is at its greatest during the early years because, they conclude, "she begins to assume economic independence through the retention of bridewealth and the role of producer in the Limbu agricultural system and the market economy" (1976b: 178). Although the role of women is still crucial the position is slightly different for the Tamang woman because she, unlike her Limbu counterpart, does not control the bridewealth or participate to any extent in a market economy. It is not so much financial independence which permits her a certain degree of choice, but her value to her natal household as a producer which ensures that should she become dissatisfied with her marriage she can return to her natal home at any time. Moreover, if she remains there on the death of her father she retains the right of residence in his home and of maintenance by her brothers.

The formation of marriage alliances is thus to a certain extent counteracted by the strength of natal household ties. In the early years before a woman is securely established in her own household (where she will also have rights of residence and maintenance on the death of her husband) her primary allegiance is to her natal home which she knows will act as a safety net whenever she wishes to return. Unlike her husband who has made a considerable investment in the brideprice and all the expenses of the wedding she has nothing to lose should the marriage be terminated. True, her father has an obligation to return the brideprice but with sufficient prevarication he can delay the repayment almost indefinitely.

In some instances where there is no intention of a speedy re-marriage the divorce may be left unformalised for years. Its completion involves nothing more than the drawing up of a document testifying that the couple have permanently parted (N - chor patra) and the repayment of the brideprice. However, if adultery (jari muta) is also involved a fine may be payable. Legally the injured party can claim compensation of Rs 1,000 but claims settled within

the village are always for a much smaller sum. If a woman's husband decides to divorce her but she does not consent to the separation she has the recourse of taking the matter before the head of the pañcāyat and an impromptu council of elders who will hear the views of both sides. If they feel the woman has a reasonable case they can exert considerable pressure on the man to give the marriage a second chance. After they have divorced women prefer to wait at least a year before remarrying, 'so that people will not say we are like prostitutes, going from one man to another'.

Secular authority and dispute settlement

Although the village is not characterized by serious cleavages or factionalism, disputes are continually arising which cover the whole gamut of issues that typically beset small, closely-knit communities - quarrels over women, petty theft, boundary disputes, broken agreements, etc. Arguments frequently come to a head when one or both participants are the worse for drink, and the verbal abuse and vituperation which follow can reach astonishing levels; however, physical violence of any sort is extremely rare. A favourite technique is to wait until one's opponent is in the fields way below the village, then from the vantage point of the path or the house courtyard to launch a torrent of abuse at him. This of course has the effect of bringing everyone else out to see what is the matter and they all chime in with their own opinions. If the opponents get near enough to throw rocks or to seem in danger of attacking each other their kinsmen rush out to separate them.

Many quarrels fester on for years without any positive action being taken but where there is a specific grievance or a threat to the peace of the community the matter is initially taken before the head of the administrative village (N - pradhān) and four or five respected villagers. These latter do not constitute any sort of formal council but are drawn from men in their 40s and 50s who have a good standing in the community and a reputation for fairness. After some hours of heated discussion in which both sides together with supporters and witnesses put their case a judgement is given and usually respected: the participants may be fined and bound over to keep the peace on pain of further penalties, a boundary be re-defined, or a domestic quarrel resolved. The disputants then finance the serving of beer to the mediators and contribute a few rupees

for the time they have given to the proceedings.

In more serious cases the grievance can be taken before the full pañcāyat council at one of its monthly meetings but again the accent there is more on reconciliation of the parties than punishment. Thus almost all disputes and criminal breaches are settled within the community and it is unusual for external authorities to be involved in law and order enforcement. The only exception to this in recent times was the case of a boy who embarked on a wild series of petty thefts and then tried to sell the loot to other villagers. This outraged so many people that when he fled a posse was organized to pursue him and bring him back to justice; he escaped them and went into hiding for a period but was eventually recaptured and handed over to the police post in Dhunche. But in general such concerted action is unusual and many cases of theft where a culprit is suspected but nothing can be proved are ignored by the community at large although it may shatter all relations between the victims and the family they suspect. Theft is a rather common crime; although universally condemned it is not seen as the result of social pressures or poverty but of the innate 'badness' of the individuals concerned.

The local council has a number of other functions as well as the maintenance of law and order. The office of head or leader of the council replaced the former one of village headman (N - mukhiyā) in the 1962 administrative reforms which created the pañcāyat system of local councils. Although succession is by election (N - bor) the office is invariably filled by wealthy men of prominent lineages who in any case would be expected to provide the village with its leadership. Like his predecessor the village headman, the head of the council acts as an agent of government - collecting the land taxes (N - tiro) and house tax on its behalf, carrying out official directives and local building projects, and entertaining visiting officials. He is entitled to a 5% commission on the revenue collected (which for Syabru totals Rs.2,400) but no longer has the right to free labour for himself, although he can demand 'voluntary' labour (N - śramadān) for a variety of communal projects such as clearing paths and ditches and building schools and offices; non-compliance by villagers with these unpopular tasks is penalized by a fine of Rs.10 per day. Although the rewards of the council leader's post are apparently meagre in fact he has many opportunities for deriving

additional benefits, not least the wide range of contacts with well-placed officials which results.

In addition to the council leader and his deputy the council is composed of 9 elected members, each representing one of the wards in the administrative village. Because the administrative unit happens to include two villages of almost equal size (Syabru and Bhariku), each with their established structures of power and authority, the council is split very much on village lines with each endeavouring to secure for itself the maximum benefit from the various government grants made available and seeking to have its own candidate elected as leader. At election time the competition between the two villages is fierce and quarrels are frequent. As well as the council itself there is the associated Women's Organization (N - mahilā saṅgathan) which has three members concerned with affairs specifically of interest to women and which mediates in disputes and grievances involving women.

The village and the outside world

Although on the face of it the pañcāyat system gives everyone a say in the running of the village, the district and ultimately the nation, it is in fact an avenue to power for the few and concerns most people very little (11). Its effects are seen rather in reverse, as an instrument of government which is gradually bringing once remote areas more and more within the orbit of the central administration. Where once villages such as Syabru were left pretty much to their own devices as long as they paid their taxes, they are now subject to a relentless barrage of propaganda about the virtues of the present political system, to visits by officials concerned with development projects, and to ever-increasing demands on their time and labour for new building projects.

It is not only the administrative system that has brought changes to villages like Syabru; new ideas and aspirations are making their appearance, disseminated by a variety of routes. Three media are principally implicated in the presentation of images of a life far different from the traditional Tamang one: the radio, education and improved land communications. Three people in Syabru now own radio sets and many villagers are able to listen to the broadcasts from Kathmandu and Delhi which provide up-to-date news of the outside world and present a view of life stressing urban concerns and ideas rather than traditional rural interests.

Many larger villages now have government funded schools. In an area with a 95% illiteracy rate and low school attendance, education instills only the most basic reading and writing skills. However, all teaching is through the medium of the Nepali language which younger children do not understand well and is in effect a foreign language to them. The teachers are drafted in from distant parts of Nepal and are often of a quite different cultural background to their pupils. In the curriculum a heavy emphasis is placed on subjects which it is hoped will inculcate ideals of nationhood in the disparate populations of Nepal, with much stress on the national boundaries, the flag, the royal family and the pañcāyat system; no place is given to the values of the indigenous culture.

Improved access to the bazaar towns and to Kathmandu (with the prospect of a road soon being built up the Trisuli valley itself) has led to a greatly increased two-way flow of traffic: villagers can more easily visit the towns and officials visit the region more frequently and in greater numbers, so that people become used to interacting with a wide variety of castes and types of people. While there are still many women and children in Syabru who have never been to Kathmandu (locally, Yam-bu), increasing numbers of men make annual or more frequent trips there in the pursuit of various business deals.

One result of this interaction is an increased desire on the part of young people to escape to the towns, either to go to high school in Kathmandu or to find well paid clerical jobs in Indian cities; despite the apparent odds against succeeding in this world increasing numbers try, and some evidently do well. Parents, when asked why they do not send their children to school, reply "with a certain amount of justice - that it will only put ideas into their heads, make them think they are too good to do peasants' work and want to leave the village.

At present the drift to the towns and the desire for upward mobility which in part fuels it are at an early stage. Their further progress is hampered not only by prevailing economic circumstances and lack of education but by the Tamangs' low status in the ritual hierarchy of Hindu Nepal where (despite the formal abolition of caste barriers) they are treated by caste Hindus on a par with other Bhote groups as matwāli (alcohol drinking) castes, not far above untouchables. In their own region this is not an issue of much immediate concern for they have so few dealings with members of other castes (12); the majority of their contacts are with other Tamangs or with Tibetans and Sherpas

who, as fellow Buddhists, are regarded as being on an essentially equal footing. However, when they do interact with other castes they must of necessity accept the restrictions on commensality and contact imposed by the hierarchy of purity and pollution; this has been internalized to the extent that they view themselves as superior to the untouchables, forbid them entry to their houses and would regard a Tamang woman who sleeps with one as seriously polluted herself. They are less certain about the high castes' claims to superiority for according to their own beliefs it is only the lamas and holy men who are of superior status. Seen from the Tamang point of view, then, there is a complete correspondence between Hindu and indigenous beliefs in respect of the bottom rungs of the system but a divergence with regard to classifying the higher echelons.

Elsewhere in Nepal other tribal groups, most notably the Thakalis, have attempted to come to terms with their low status in the caste hierarchy through the formation of cultural associations and by a conscious process of hinduization - toning down and eradicating customs which put them at a disadvantage in Hindu society and adopting more prestigious ones - in an attempt to make themselves more acceptable (Bista, 1971; von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1975). The Thakalis had pressing economic reasons for accomplishing this transformation which so far do not exist for the Tamangs. However those few families in search of political power do find they have a similar need to improve their status. They now wear Nepali national costume, educate their children in Kathmandu and are gradually dropping their more obviously Tibetan customs such as celebrating Tibetan New Year in favour of Nepali festivals such as Dasain and Tihar. More curious and perhaps counterproductive has been the attempt by these same families to revalue other aspects of Tamang culture through the preservation of songs and literature and the writing of a pseudo-history (Tashi Phinjo Lama & Iman Singh Lama, op.cit.). This account tries to show that the Tibeto-Burman races were the original inhabitants of Nepal, as 'proved' for instance by the supposed Tibetan origin of the name 'Nepal', by the legend of the draining of the lake of the Kathmandu Valley by a Tibetan god, Jampalyang (Manjushri), by the essential unity of the language and customs of the mongoloid hill tribes, and by the pléthora of Buddhist monuments in Nepal of great antiquity, Buddhism being the religion of the hill peoples.

Conclusion

Two features of major importance in Tamang social organization have emerged from this account: on the one hand the strength of patrilineal kinship ties founded on common interests in property and, on the other, the importance of the household as the primary unit of production and consumption. At certain stages of the domestic cycle these principles are in conflict with one another, exacerbating tensions between households, lineages and marriage partners and frequently leading to quarrels and divorces. Marriage signals the loss of a useful producer to one household while the gain to the recipient household is no more than temporary, since it inevitably presages the fission of that household and of the patrimony as the son seeks control of his own share of the property and founds his own household. 'Successful' marriages depend not only on relations between the spouses but on the willingness of the wife-givers to relinquish their daughters and the wife-receivers to effect a speedy division of the property. While most households conform to type one also finds a variety of alternative strategies to cope with the problems of property and labour, including joint families, uxori-local marriages and polygynous marriages.

It is clear that a variety of changes is taking place both as a result of external forces and internal pressures. These include the reluctance of women to marry young, the displacement of arranged marriages by ones based on mutual affection, increasing emigration to the cities by young people of both sexes, and pressures to adopt the Nepali language and to conform to Hindu customs. The theme of a changing society is taken up again in the next chapter which is in part concerned with changes in the religious sphere.

Notes to Chapter 3

(1) Source: T P & I S Lama, 1976. But an alternative account states "the Tamangs originated from four families living at a place called Wuijang. The four families were Bal, Yonjin, Moktan and Ghising..." (Ministry of Defence, 1965: 111). The same source retells another myth whereby the Tamangs are the descendants of Mahesur, the youngest of three brothers, who was tricked by the older two, Brahma and Vishnu, into eating the flesh of a cow and thus he and his descendants became socially degraded. The compensatory functions of this story are clear in the setting of an army of mixed castes but it was not one known to the people of Syabru nor one that seemed congruent with their own attitudes to the caste hierarchy.

Macdonald (1980) reports yet another account in which the dismemberment of a yak features. Here the original ancestor Ldongchen-po dpong-grags (of Dongchembu) divides up a yak carcass amongst his descendants, naming each of the 18 rus (clans) for a part of the carcass.

(2) The Sherpas also claim to be descended from 18 clans (von Hüfer-Haimendorf, 1964: 19) but Macdonald (1975a: 145) draws attention to Stein's comment that the classificatory number 18 "has been applied to too many groups for us to draw from this valid conclusions..."

(3) See Hüfer, 1969: 21; Bista, 1972: 55; Macdonald, 1975a: 138; and Toffin, 1976: 38.

(4) Tamangs of this region sometimes describe themselves to outsiders as 'Lama-Tamangs'. Moreover a number of high status wealthy Tamangs take the term 'Lama' as a surname, whereas ordinary peasants, if required to give a surname for some official purpose, say 'Tamang'. This usage should in no way be confused with the religious specialists (Tib. bla-ma) who as a matter of respect and courtesy have their name prefixed with the title 'Lama' (although in Tibet itself such a grandiose term (= superior one) would not normally be given to an ordinary village priest). Their status derives not from wealth (some indeed are poor) but from their ritual abilities.

In a recent paper appearing after the above was written Clarke (1980a) takes a different view of the relationship between Lama and Tamang. In Helambu he describes them as two conceptually separable groups, 'Lamas' and 'Tamangs', who are distinguishable in terms of wealth, ritual status and inheritance patterns, although they do

Notes cont.

exhibit continuities of language, clan structure etc. 'Lama villages' and 'Lama people' he sees as developing out of intermarriage between descendants of the dominant (religious) lineage lamas and other local inhabitants, who then began to form villages centred on the temples (gompas). 'Lama people' are thus variously characterised by 1) wealth and high status, 2) control of temple property and 3) status of village member and sponsor of rituals in a village centred on a temple.

Although there is close agreement between Clarke's and my data in most respects, I could not confirm with regard to Syabru his view that "in relation to Tamang people, all members of such a temple community are Lamas" (*ibid*: 82). I would mention the following points: a) in Syabru no village members take the suffix 'Lama'; b) the only people to take the honorific prefix 'lama' have special ritual status by birth or training; c) in this sub-group the only digression from the normal rules of inheritance in favour of primogeniture is in the family of the man who actually controls the temple - once control of the temple has been assumed by the older son his younger brothers will continue to follow normal inheritance patterns, while still of course remaining ritual specialists; d) in Bharku those families which take the suffix 'Lama' (women included) have no special ritual status.

Matters are somewhat blurred because the wealthy Lama families of Bharku do intermarry with the religious specialists of Syabru (see page 84 and Fig 4) but it seems to me that for the present it is necessary to maintain the distinction between high status wealthy lineages (Lamas) and lineages of religious specialists (lamas).

(5) See also Allen (1978) on fourfold classifications of society in the Himalayas. He suggests that the Tamangs in this respect may once have shared such a system of 'protoclans' with the Gurungs and Thakalis. Although these 3 clans go some way to support the hypothesis I was not able to identify a protoclan which would have completed the symmetry of the system he proposes.

(6) Cf the Lepcha ingzong relationship between ritual brothers. According to Gorer (*op cit*: 118-20) it is often contracted between trading partners.

(7) On Tibetan polyandry see Aziz, 1978: 105-6. Tibetans also see this form of marriage as an economic arrangement which not only keeps land together but increases the household's labour force.

Notes cont.

(8) A metonymy for the cup in which it is given - cf Tibetan zhal-dkar - a respectful term for a drinking vessel of porcelain (Das, 1976: 1068); also zhal-skyen - drink for a holy man (ibid).

(9) No brideprice is given by Tamangs in more eastern areas, if von Führer-Haimendorf is correct on this point (1956: 171).

(10) It is difficult to compare this finding with other Himalayan societies since no common format has been used for reporting the figures. But in all cases divorce is very common. See Aziz, 1978: 180ff; Oppitz, 1968: 124; Pignède, 1966: 263ff; Jones & Jones, 1976a: 121ff for Tibetan, Sherpa, Gurung and Limbu cases respectively.

(11) Following the recent unrest in Nepal (1979) it appears possible that the pañcāyat system may be overhauled or even replaced by a more truly democratic system.

(12) Höfer in a fascinating account of the operation of the Muluki Ain legal code of 1854 shows how by this date the Tamangs had yet to emerge as a distinct ethnic group, at least in the minds of the Muluki Ain's codifiers. The various terms Murmi, Murnibhotyā and Lāmā denoted their Bhote status which classed them as 'enslavable alcohol-drinkers' (N - māsinyā matwāli), above the impure Newar castes and the untouchables but below other ethnic groups such as the Gurungs and Magars. Not until 1932 did the 'Twelve Tamang (clans)' obtain official approval for the comprehensive appellation Tamang to replace these terms (Höfer, 1979: 146-9).

CHAPTER FOUR

THE CULT OF THE TERRITORIAL DEITIES

The previous chapters have touched on some of the ways in which traditional Tamang society is changing. The religious enterprise is by no means exempt from this process and in this opening account of Tamang religious practice and thought I shall explore a series of rituals which have already been abandoned in the southern, more Hinduised parts of the region, while in the north they are undergoing a period of retrenchment and revaluation.

The rationale for the rituals under consideration stems from the peasant's relationship with the environment and particularly from the importance of achieving success with the harvest on which so much depends. For the Tamang this success is not seen to result from personal effort, skill or judgement so much as from the maintenance of a satisfactory and harmonious relationship with a variety of supernatural beings who exert a controlling influence on the one hand over the land, the crops and the weather, and on the other over the luck and good fortune of individual households, the village and the kingdom as a whole. An examination of the worship of these supernatural beings can thus tell us something about the ways in which both social relationships and the relationship with the natural world are conceptualised and acted upon in the religious domain.

How this aspect of religion dovetails with the dominant Buddhist ideology is a theme which has been largely neglected in anthropological accounts of Tibetan Buddhist societies in which attention has focused on the grand monastic ceremonies and major festivals. (This is less true of studies of Theravāda Buddhist societies where considerable efforts have been devoted to examining the interrelationship of these two facets of the religious enterprise - cf Tambiah, 1970; Spiro, op cit.) The interaction between these alternative religious approaches provides the second focus of the chapter, which will also introduce the total pantheon of Buddhist and local gods and some of the recurrent ritual forms and symbols which have a wider reference than this particular set of rites.

A number of calendrical rituals are relevant to my theme, including Dasain, the Gosāikund pilgrimage, the bi-annual worship of the village god and the annual worship of the deity associated with the clan and the household, known as the birth-god (ke-lha). It is the last of these with which I shall be principally concerned for it illuminates particularly clearly the interrelationship between this whole set of rituals and between their respective focal deities, demonstrates how some of the principles of social organisation explored in previous chapters are manifested in the religious sphere, and shows how traditional practices are being modified by the encroachment of Buddhism.

Worship of the birth-god is classed as being of the lha söl or supplicatory type, and thus exemplifies the first of the three modes of ritual action which characterise Tamang relations with the supernatural. Conceptually it stands in contrast to offering ceremonies and exorcistic ceremonies, although it contains elements of both. It takes place in the month of Baisākh (April/May) just before the first harvest begins.

Although the birth-god is a tutelary deity whose influence supposedly extends to all the members of a clan, its worship is not undertaken collectively, nor is it directed by a specific clan specialist. It is the duty of each household to conduct its own ceremony, not necessarily on the same day as the others, under the supervision of its senior male member. If the ritual is directed by the householder himself it will deal purely with the non-Buddhist pantheon of territorial and ancestral deities. However, he may alternatively or additionally call in a Buddhist priest in which case a radically different type of ritual is conducted, directed primarily to the goddess Palten Lhamo with only a perfunctory acknowledgement of the local and ancestral gods. The Buddhist ceremony has supplanted the traditional ritual to the extent that over two-thirds of Syabru households now perform this type either exclusively or in addition to the traditional form of worship. Those few who cling to the old way - mainly members of the Shangba and Thokra clans - say that the Buddhist ritual does not agree with their birth-god and that if they attempt to perform it they would be punished by illness or bad luck.

I begin by examining the background to the traditional supplication of the birth-god as performed by the Shangba clan, then show how a particular view of the cult of the territorial deities emerges from the ritual structure; in the second half of the chapter the lamaistic

alternative is described and contrasted with the traditional ceremony.

Clan myths

The Shangba clan has a rather special relationship with the village and its surrounding area for it was their ancestor who was the founding father of Syabru. For this reason their birth-god ceremony is of particular interest. How the village was founded is related in a brief legend:

"Long ago, in the high foothills of the Himālaya where the great mountain Langtang Lirung rises, a man went hunting in the forest. His name was Shang Karpo (1) and he was a Tamang of the Shangba clan. Growing tired in the heat of the day, he sat down to rest in the shade of a tree. On awakening from his sleep, he saw a shining white being standing before him. It was the god Gupje Senge Karpo. The god addressed the hunter thus: 'Why are you sleeping here? I've made a much better place down there on the ridge and marked the spot with a cairn of three white stones. Go down there and take your rest!'

"So Shang Karpo went down to the ridge below which the god had indicated and there, as promised, he found the cairn of three white stones. And finding it to be a good place - sheltered, not too steep and with a supply of clear water -- he decided to stay there. Fetching his wife and children, he built himself a house on the spot where the cairn had been."

A number of features can be highlighted in this rather conventional story. The myth suggests that the first settlers were hunters rather than agricultur^{al}ists, men without a fixed territory of their own, evidently free to wander where they would in search of food. The god Gupje who appeared to Shang Karpo was by contrast a settled god, owner of that particular area in which Syabru lies. In fact he belongs to the class of deities known as place owners (jhipda; Tib. gzhi-bdag) and his influence extends over the whole area in which Syabru people farm, graze their animals and utilize the forests.

Two points need to be noted here: firstly, that the initiative came from the god himself to invite men to settle here; as a place owner he was entitled to permit the founding of the village and he exercised his authority without compulsion or coercion on the part of men, freely granting what was his to give. Secondly, it is clear that the god is actively interested in and sympathetic towards human

affairs; he is not an isolated remote god but one who interacts with men on basically human terms. It is his benevolent aspect which is stressed over and over again in the play on the symbol of whiteness in the names of the chief personalities ('Karmo'), the appearance of the god ('shining white') and the cairn 'of three white stones'. (White is also the colour associated with maleness, with the white bone of the lineage, in contrast to red the colour associated with femaleness and the 'flesh' (sha) of the affines.)

Although informants tell the story as a supposedly 'historical' account of the foundation of the village, the myth also seems to be saying that men have entered into a new type of relationship with the personified natural world. They have changed their means of livelihood from hunting to farming, become sedentary rather than unfettered and, like the god Gupje, associated with control over a particular piece of territory which, however, they hold only at his pleasure; the relationship is one of dependence.

But territoriality brings with it a new set of problems for men, as the second myth in the cycle makes clear. Shang Karmo settles into what is now the topmost section of the village (Pati-gang) but now needs a husband for his daughter. In a piece of benevolence echoing the generosity of the god Gupje he invites a member of the Pidako clan to marry her and to found the second village section (contrary to the usual Tamang practice of virilocal marriage). This has calamitous consequences:

"Saying, 'this is a good place but we are alone here' Shang Karmo went searching for companions and brought back some Pidakos, one of whom married his daughter. The son-in-law built his house in Gompa-gang section.

"Some time later the son-in-law went hunting in the hills but, having no success, went on to a place where he had planted some fruit (N - phalphul). The fruit had gone. He returned home and said to his wife, 'What's happened to our fruit?'. She replied, 'It's all right, father's ox (N - goru) ate it'. Out of sorts over his hunting failure the man flew into a rage and killed his father-in-law.

"Then in fear the whole Pidako clan left the village but as they camped for the night at Meera (on the trail to Gosāikund) one of the women said, 'The whole family has escaped but we should at least leave behind the seed of the family (N - santānko biu rākme)'.

"So they put a young child in a bag (N - thaili) and rolled it back down the hillside to Syabru where it survived and grew up. And to this day there is only one Pidako family in Syabru."

Again, informants tell the story to account for the presence of only a single Pidako household in the village but its true significance when taken with the first myth would seem to be rather different. The first myth dealt with the relationship between men and gods which is characterised by the dependence of the former on the latter, and with the principle of locality - men's association with a particular piece of territory. The second myth turns to the relationship between groups of men, specifically between the clans which are allied by marriage, and between households which, because of the boundaries established by the control of land and property, have become potential competitors. The household is seen in the myths as the focus of tension between the principles of descent and the control of land, and of alliance between clan groups - as indeed is still the case as previous chapters have suggested.

Shang Karpo's literally fatal error was to overvalue the strength of the bonds of kinship and to undervalue the divisive power of territorial claims which even to this day are the cause of frequent quarrels over boundaries between the tiny fields.

These myths help to establish the basic paradigm within which the ke-lha ritual takes place - that of restating men's dependence on the deities which control the land and of seeking the renewal of their protection and benevolence for the coming year. They also point to the various relationships with which the ritual is concerned; those between the gods and a particular territory, and between the gods and particular social groups. They also deal with relationships among the gods themselves and between men, for it will become clear when considering the full ritual that Gupje is by no means the only god with a territorial interest in Syabru, merely one in a whole network of such deities.

Constructing the altar

Tamang rituals are never concerned solely with a single deity taken in isolation; although a particular god may be the focus of a given ritual it always appears in association with a whole range of others who are connected by a specific pattern of interrelationships. Confusing though this array of supernatural figures appears at first

sight, its key is provided by a relatively small number of principles - hierarchy, mood, sex, and so on; studying the patterned relationships can reveal a good deal about the way in which the Tamangs view the supernatural world. Fortunately the task is made easier - not only for the observer but for the officiant himself who may on different occasions be dealing with literally scores of gods and spirits - by the standard practice of constructing a three dimensional representation of the relevant portion of the supernatural world - an altar.

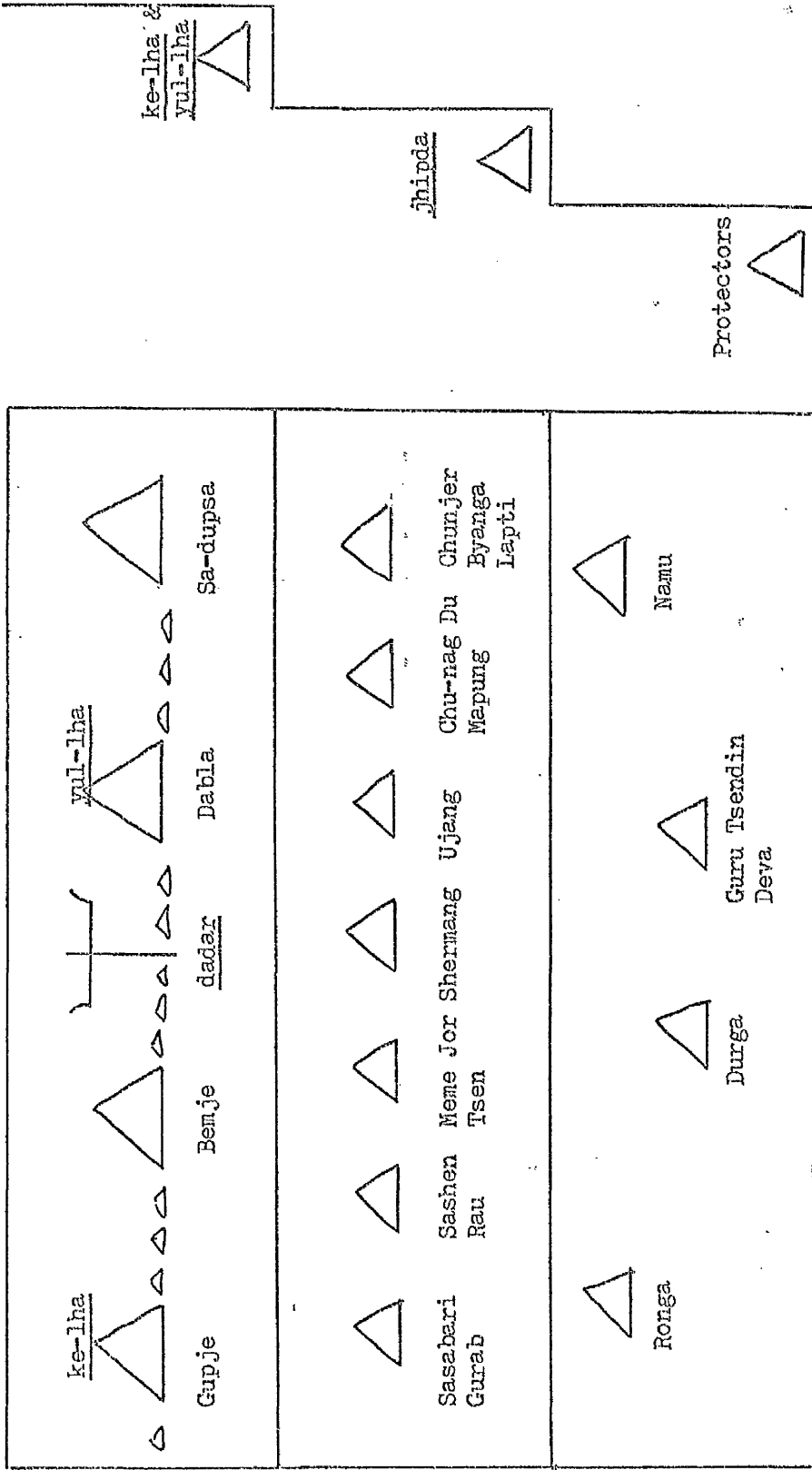
Before the altar can be set up it is the usual practice to purify the surroundings in which the encounter with the gods will take place. This is stated to be because the gods are to be invited as honoured guests to the altar and it is essential there should be nothing to pollute or offend them. The requirement of purity in any encounter with the sacred is of course a familiar principle but the specific prohibitions in the case of the birth-god appear to be a unique set not found on other occasions. On the day of the ceremony it is forbidden to cook or eat nettles, to eat beef or to place the feet near the hearth of the fire. A general programme of cleaning is also undertaken by the women of the household who sweep out the house, smear the hearth with fresh mud, burnish the copper water vessels and brass plates until they gleam, and fetch in extra supplies of water. Tamangs normally eat beef without compunction but this ritual will incorporate several Hindu deities and it seems likely that the prohibition is out of respect for their taboos. Tamangs also eat nettles, particularly when other food supplies are short, although they claim they do not; in this case the ban has to do not only with the inferior quality of nettles as the food of the poor but with the fact that they are wild food as opposed to cultivated. In a ceremony largely concerned with enlisting the gods' help with the harvest, with the supply of cultivated food, the introduction of wild food would be inappropriate. Lastly, the hearth as the symbolic centre of the household is perhaps associated with the god as a household deity and for this reason must be kept pure.

In this purified space the main work of constructing the altar can begin, a task which occupies far longer than the actual ceremony. The officiant undertakes the work himself, assisted by other male members of the household; women take no part in these preparations other than to serve food and drink to the officiant, and do not handle the ritual materials. Although every house contains the wooden

cabinet used as a Buddhist altar this is not employed in the present case since the ceremony incorporates no Buddhist deities. Instead a fresh altar made from a board covered with a clean cloth and surrounded by an arch of boughs decorated with white rhododendrons (mla mendo) is set up next to the Buddhist altar against the same wall of the house. In the centre of the altar is placed the da-dar, the metal trident with five strips of coloured cloth wound round it which serves as a beacon to direct the gods to the ceremony. On either side of it are placed a whole variety of weapons - several small arrows, two long swords, two pointed sticks, a spear and a magic dagger (phurba; Tib. phur-pa). The purpose of the weapons is to deter or, in the last resort, fight off any encroaching demons who may get out of hand and try to disrupt the ceremony.

Now begins the business of making the tormas (Tib. gtor-ma), an essential feature of all Tamang rituals whichever gods they are directed at. These are essentially conical or pyramidal structures made from moist pliable dough, or from butter or from cold cooked rice. A complex symbolism of form, material and colour goes into the making so that the particular characteristics of any deity may be represented. In the present case their form is unlike that usually found in Buddhist rituals: they are about 25 cms. high, conical in shape and with short spindly arms and legs. The material used is cooked rice, a more valuable substance than flour and hence more pleasing to the gods, although not as valuable as butter. The tormas are not coloured but left white because the deities concerned are all of a peaceful benign disposition. Although participants may help in moulding the rice into the rough outline required, it is the officiant who moulds the final form of the tormas.

The completed altar has an array of 15 large tormas and a number of minor ones which provide a superb visual and spatial representation of the deities concerned in the ritual. The altar is shown schematically in Figure 6. It is arranged in three tiers, the highest rear-most tier containing the focal gods of the ceremony. First amongst them is of course Gupje Senge Karpo, god of the Shangbas and place owner of Syabru. Gupje's actual physical location is a 'milk lake' (N - dudh kund) in the hills above Syabru, which has the magical property of an inflow and an outflow of perfectly clear water while the lake itself is of a milky whiteness; again one sees the piling up of yet more images of whiteness in the case of this deity. Milk



Sideview

Fig 6 -- The Shangba birth-god altar

lakes are found all over Nepal and are generally held to have sacred connotations. Next to Gupje is placed the tormo of Bemje Senge Marpo, a goddess who is his consort or 'wife' and is associated with a neighbouring lake and her own territorial domain. Around them are grouped a number of much smaller tormas which are described as their 'children' (kola) who are named Men, Tsen, Bön, Du-she, Shing-bön and Lü-tor. These 'children' are all conceived of as territorial beings of a quite different order to the local gods. Rather than ruling over a substantial tract of land they are highly localised - they live in rocks, trees, springs, meadows, streams and the ground itself - and are regarded as controlling only their immediate environment, which they do with terrible ferocity. If left alone they are relatively harmless but should anyone dare to displease them - for instance, by building on or near their spot, by chopping down their tree, by polluting their spring, fishing in their river or mining their depths - their anger is liable to be extreme and vengeful. They will inflict the culprit with boils, ulcers, skin diseases, diarrhoea and many other difficulties, and as a matter of fact they are regularly divined to be the cause of illness and misfortune. Since these demons are found so thickly scattered about the landscape it is almost impossible for any man to go about his daily affairs without sooner or later upsetting one or other of them, often without initially realising it. It is thus a matter of urgent concern to seek protection as far as possible from these malevolent forces and the principal source of such protection lies with those deities who are more powerful than they - who control them just as parents control their children.

The figures on the rear right of the altar parallel this arrangement exactly, although on a different level of social and territorial inclusiveness. Dabla (2) is classed with the group of gods known as yul-lha or 'country gods' and is specifically the god of Syabru village, responsible for the protection of all its inhabitants and the success of the harvests etc. He is located in a stone above the village water supply and is - or should be - worshipped collectively by the whole village twice a year in the months of Mangsir (November/December) and Baisākhi (April/May). A collection is taken from every household of one māna (= 1 lb.) of rice and one mohar (half rupee) coin for the purchase of a cock which is sacrificed to him. The rite is conducted by the religious specialist known as the lha-bön or lha tapke, a hereditary function vested in a lineage of the Teba

clan, at the spot where the god's stone dwelling place is situated. However, the cult of the territorial deities is now in such disarray that the yul-lha ceremony was not performed during my stay. Some of the strange events surrounding this omission are described in Chapter 7. Fortunately Höfer (1972) has been able to record the text of a similar ceremony in Dhading (where the tribal priest is known as the lambu) which gives some of the flavour of the occasion.

Like his counterpart Gupje, Dabla too has a female aspect or 'wife' called Sa-dupsa who is the tutelary goddess of the neighbouring village of Wangbi (Syabru Bēsi) which is closely linked with Syabru itself. And like Gupje and Bemje this couple too are surrounded by their children who are given exactly the same names - i.e. another similar group of water sprites and demons who fall under the control of the country gods.

The lower second tier of the altar repeats the territorial and male/female themes but is devoted to deities of wider territorial extent than the household and village gods and which are less central to this particular ritual. It is interesting that they are included at all for it clearly shows that the villagers, far from pursuing an 'isolationist' policy of attending to their own deity to the exclusion of all others, do have a structured view of the territorial deities. Just as the myths recounted earlier linked the territorial sections of the village through clan intermarriage the ritual altar links villages and religious sites through the interrelated deities in the same way that villages themselves are linked by marriage, trade and so on. Thus Meme Jor Tsen is the village god of Bharku while many of the others on this tier are associated with the Gosālkund lakes, a religious focal point of the area which draws people from all over the surrounding region at the time of the annual pilgrimage. The location of Shermang and Ujang could not be pinpointed, while in the third front row of the altar, Ronga and Namu are territorial deities from further north.

The two deities to the forefront are both Hindu: Durga, primarily associated with the Dasain festival celebrated throughout the country in October who by virtue of her position as the King of Nepal's clan deity extends her protection to the whole kingdom. She is the wife of Siva who is also represented in the guise of Guru Tsendin Deva, worshipped by Hindus as Gokarneshwar Mahādeo at the sacred site of Gokarna near Kathmandu, where there is a stone liṅga (N) of great sanctity enshrining this god.

The ritual performance

In contrast to the lengthy preparations, the ritual performance of the ceremony is brief. The officiant begins by burning juniper leaves (shukpa; Tib. shug:-pa) to create a pleasant incense, and sprinkles beer on the tormas as serkim (Tib. gser-skyems), the 'gold drink' or libation for the gods. He sings softly and gently, calling to the gods to come and partake of the fine food, drink and perfume being offered to them and to enjoy the surroundings with their leaves and flowers and to take up their places in the tormas which have been prepared for them. The gods enter the appropriate tormas and the officiant then reminds them of his name and 'address' and of the names of his family. He assures them of his devotion and begs the gods' blessings and protection for the coming year - to keep them free of the lŭ and dü demons which bring illness, protect them from snakes and the malignant attacks of witches, to protect the crops from marauding wild animals and the harvest from bad weather. The gods are then thanked for listening to these boons and then allowed to depart from their tormas.

The following day most of the tormas are distributed to other villagers and this is also the occasion for inviting one's neighbours in to feast and drink; every passerby is liable to be subjected to goodhumoured attempts to drag him into the house to receive hospitality, which good manners dictate he should at first resist. The main tormas, Gupje and Bemje, are not given away but consumed by the family who thus absorb the magical power of the gods. The tormas thus undergo the triple transformation also seen in Buddhist ritual, beginning as an offering, becoming an embodiment or evocation of the god generated within it and ending as a magical food substance. In Tibetan these three stages are known as mchod-pa, sgrub-dus lha and ngos sgrub (Beyer, 1978: 377). The Tamangs, however, refer to the final god-transformed food as tse-tup or 'life attainment' from the Tibetan tshe sgrub.

The local pantheon and the territorial hierarchy

Seen from the perspective of this and other related rituals dealing with the non-Buddhist protector deities the local pantheon comprises a tripartite division of the cosmos into gods, men and demons (further details on the many varieties of demons appear in Chapter 5). Men occupy an ambiguous position in this classification for, unlike the

gods, they cannot exert any direct control over the threatening demons whose potential victims they are. Moreover men are equally dependent in a different way on the whims of the gods, having no rights as such in the lands they cultivate except through their good offices. The gods as place owners or masters of the earth (Tib. sa-bdag) control both men and demons within their territory.

The gods themselves are envisaged as interrelated and ranked in terms of a hierarchy of power and control which is based on the territory they oversee. At the most all-embracing level are Durga and Siva whose powers extend throughout the kingdom as protectors of the King's subjects. Within this domain come the regional enclaves of the place owners, gods such as Ronga, Namu and Gupje and various other mountain gods not encountered in the present ceremony (for example, Ghenyi Lirung, god of the mountain Langtang Lirung). At the more local level come the country gods who oversee a particular village and at the most immediate level are the household gods associated with particular clans. (Gupje himself is slightly anomalous in this context since he is functioning as both place owner to the whole village and household god to the Shangba clan.)

Many examples in these latter categories are based on prominent natural features such as milk lakes, mountain peaks and rock outcrops, chosen often for their intrinsic properties of shape, colour (e.g. whiteness) and situation which help to invest the gods with a semblance of non-human naturalness which belies their close relationship with social thought and experience (cf Hobart, 1978). My interest here is in how these 'natural symbols' which appear to legitimate the natural order of things are in fact an aspect of social experience, the supposed genesis of which has been shifted from the social order to the natural environment, whence it is re-imported into social life as an external force conceptualised as supernatural. To begin with, there is the clear parallel between men's tenuous rights over land in the face of the place owners' controlling interests, and their actually limited rights vis-à-vis the King's controlling interests. On rights to land in India Dumont notes that:

"far from a given piece of land being exclusively related to one person, individual or corporate, each piece of land was the object of different rights relating to different functions, expressed as the right to a share of the produce.....The king's share in particular expressed an overall right over all land."

(Dumont, 1972: 202)

Much the same position obtained in Nepal and it will be remembered that in fact Syabru in the nineteenth century was given as an emolument by the ruler into the control of a Rana prince who was entitled to a share of the produce or money in lieu thereof. Even today, under the raikar system of tenure, the peasant cannot be considered as absolute owner of the land but only as enjoying certain rights of cultivation and transfer in it.

A second parallel is to be seen in the mode in which these controlling figures are approached. The supplication of the gods is highly similar to the homage rendered to kings and great men, in both cases involving the presentation of gifts, the provision of hospitality and the swearing of allegiance. (3)

The linkage between the social order and the religious structure can be taken further than this, however. Just as in other South and Southeast Asian countries such as Burma (Spiro, 1967), Sri Lanka (Gombrich, 1971) and Bali (Hobart, op cit) there is a certain isomorphism between the religious interpretation of space and the traditional political order, so a similar connection can be seen in the case of Nepal. These structural similarities are in part derived, as Spiro points out (1967: 132), from the fact that in all the Hindu and Buddhist societies of S & SE Asia the territorial and political structures were modeled after the Hindu/Buddhist conception of the heavenly realm in which the entire kingdom was organised as the cosmos in miniature.

In the case of Nepal the King, a divine incarnation of Vishnu, stood at the pinnacle of a centralised administrative structure which divided and subdivided the country into a series of districts and subdistricts, each with a functionary appointed to oversee the collection of taxes and to maintain law and order, and to see that such obligations as military service and compulsory labour were fulfilled. The unit of taxation and compulsory service was (and is) the household, their obligations being overseen by the village headman (N - mukhiyā). Above the headman came the subdistrict collector (N - jimmāwāl) responsible for groups of villages, and over him stood the district governor (N - badā-hākīm); each of them were powerful men in their own sphere, able to dispense patronage and provide protection to those under them, but each was finally subservient to the superior levels of authority.

These rights and duties were (and are) reproduced in the religious sphere with the head of the household performing the birth-god ceremony on behalf of all its members as an expression of their homage to and dependence on the clan deity in return for his patronage and protection and the tribal priest performing the worship of the country god on behalf of the village. At the most inclusive level the King performs the annual Dasain ceremony for the protection of the whole kingdom, receiving the official tika (N) blessing from the royal Brahman priest on the tenth day of Dasain. This close relationship between royalty and divinity leads by extension to an identification between - - the King's subjects and the King's personal protectress.

In the same way that Durga is identified with both a physical domain, or territory - the kingdom, and a social domain - the King's subjects, so too the other deities of the ritual have this double aspect, the place owners being associated with the residents of a district, the country gods with the residents of a village and the birth-god with the members of individual households. The deities can thus be ranked on a scale of inclusiveness in terms of both physical domain and social domain, the one isomorphic with the other:

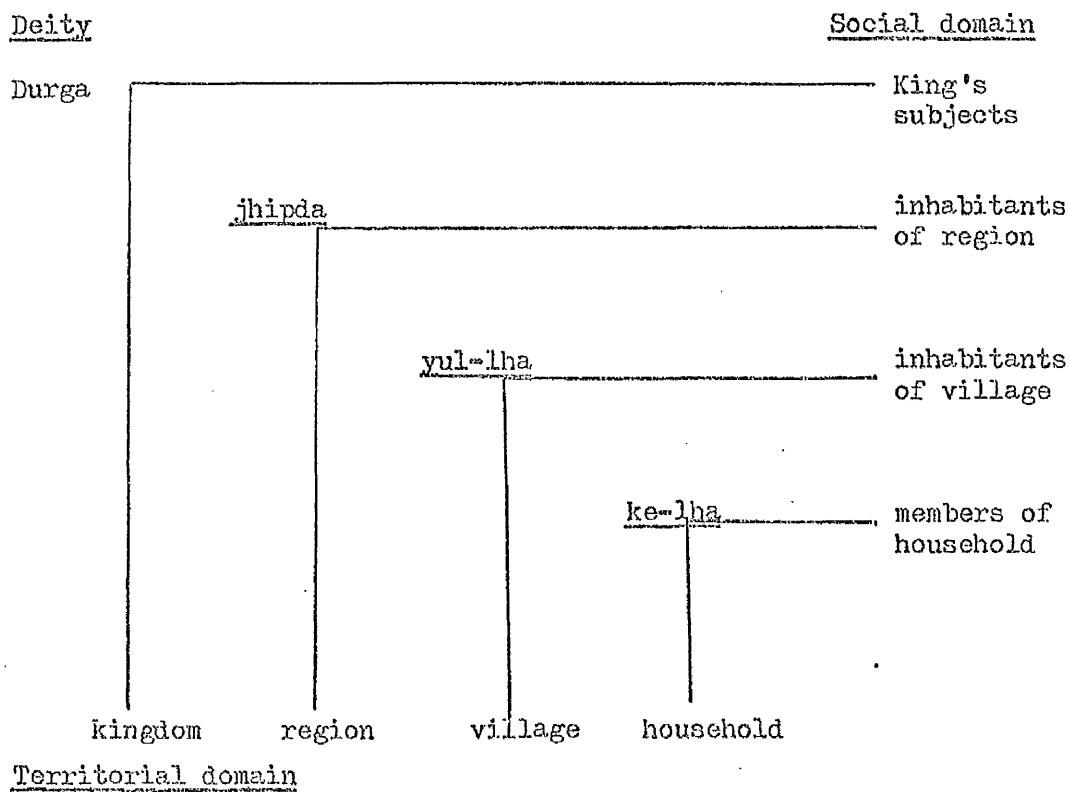


Fig 7 - Ranking of territorial deities

The cult of the territorial deities can thus be seen as propounding and reinforcing a particular view of the relations among men and between men and the natural world; that of limited control over land at different levels of territorial and social inclusiveness, the interests of each group - household, village, region - embedded within those of a yet broader group, and of men's dependence on both the natural world and the social structure to sustain their interests. At any one level of inclusiveness conflicts are mitigated by crosscutting ties of marriage, and it is marriage which provides the metaphor for the corresponding alliances between the territorial deities on this horizontal plane. The territorial deities are thus doubly able to assert their control in the face of the threatening demons: by their control of the land and by their alliances with one another.

The Buddhist ceremony

The Buddhist lha söl acknowledges the local territorial gods but treats them very differently. They are granted only a minor role in which their controlling powers are subordinated to those of explicitly Buddhist deities. The ritual procedure is more complex, being divided into two sections, and the preparations and performance occupy one or two lamas for an entire day. There is no question of a householder conducting his own ceremony for it is only the lama who, by virtue of his training and initiation, is capable of arraying and controlling the forces inherent in the ritual. Each lama has ten or a dozen client households which employ his services each year for this ritual, so that this is a period of frantic activity as he strives to complete all the ceremonies within a month or so, in addition to attending to funerals and other religious duties. The client-specialist relationship, although established by tradition and usually passed on from father to son, is not an immutable one; if a household is seriously dissatisfied with their lama or quarrels with him it is possible to change to another. The most prestigious and wealthy households tend to be associated with the most learned and senior lamas, while the poorer low status families have to take whoever they can get.

The two sections of the ritual are quite different in style, the first being directed at the peaceful shiva (Tib. zhi-ba) gods and the second part at the wrathful towa (Tib. khro-ba) deities, principal among whom are Mahākāla and Palten Lhamo. The day begins with the erecting of a yak-tail flag on a pole outside the sponsor's house and

the construction of a bonfire of pine branches in the courtyard. As before the main performance takes place indoors but this time the wooden cabinet which is the Buddhist altar is used. It is freshly decorated with the traditional seven offerings or their substitutes - water, grain, flowers and a butter-lamp, - which are offered for the pleasure and delight of the divine guests. To these is added an eighth, music, which is performed by the officiating lama on a variety of instruments, including the large drum (Tib. rnga) for keeping the basic rhythm, interspersed with cymbals (Tib. rol-mo), the small hand-drum (Tib. damaru) and conch-shell (Tib. dung). The altar is further decorated with a khukri knife daubed with butter, a da-dar trident and a dorje (Tib. rdo-rije) or 'diamond sceptre', as well as bunches of white rhododendrons.

These items recall those which as we have seen are used on the non-Buddhist altar. But the first real contrast between the two types of ritual comes in the arrangement of the tormas which is here based on quite different principles (see Fig. 8). The material used is again white rice or flour but this time only the two central tormas are specifically identified - the uppermost being for the earthly Buddha Shakyamuni (Tib. Shakyamuni) and the lower for Dabla, the village god. The remainder, arranged in only two rows, stand for classes of deities rather than individually identified figures. The upper row, known as the lama dal (Tib. bla-ma gral), represents the supramundane sphere - the Buddha flanked by a patron deity (Tib. yi-dam) and a sky-goer or kando-ma (Tib. mkha'-gro-ma), a divinity who has been described by one author as:

"a heavenly being of female appearance....who partakes of the luminous nature of space, or ether, in which she moves. She is gifted with higher knowledge and appears to the earnest seekerin human or divine, demoniacal or fairy-like, heroic or lovely, terrifying or peaceful form, in order to lead him on the way of higher knowledge and conscious realization." (Govinda, 1977: 192)

The lower, or 'protector' row (Tib. srung-ma gral), represents schematically various classes of mundane deities - the country-gods, place-owners and protectors (sung-ma) who are all regarded as, from the Buddhist point of view, inferior godlings for they are still bound to the wheel of existence just like men and are hence tainted with imperfection.

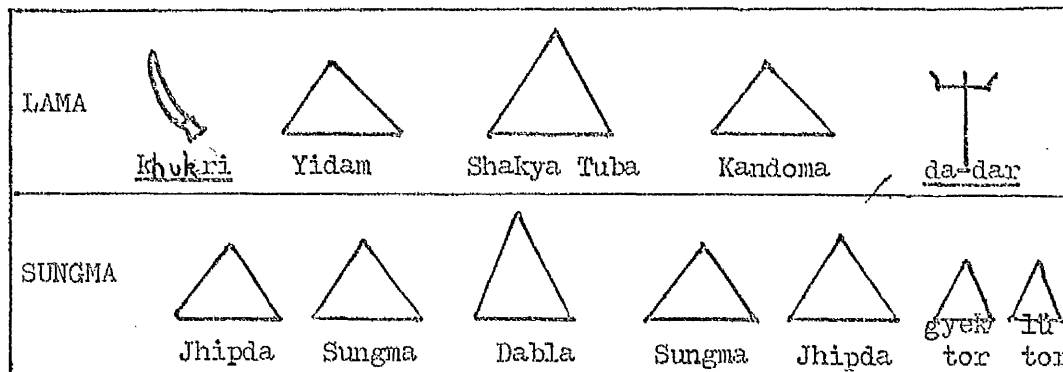


Fig. 8 -- The first Buddhist altar for the Protectors

This first section of the ritual is primarily concerned with increasing the sponsor's stock of lung-ta (Tib. rlung-rta) or life-power. This is a sort of personal store of good fortune or strength against mystical attack which is believed to be a property of all human beings. It waxes and wanes in intensity; to succumb to demon-caused illness or disaster is a sure sign that it is low, but conversely its power can be revived or recharged by using the gods as a conduit of power. Before this can be done the standard introductory form of offering must be gone through to persuade the gods to lend themselves to the ceremony. The officiating lama recites the formula of refuge and awakens the thought of enlightenment before going on to cleanse and empower the place and remove obstacles to the ritual. These usually appear in the form of the gyek or hindering demons (Tib. bregs), and the lu - nagas or serpent spirits (Tib. klu) -- who may interrupt the ritual; in order to avoid this they are bribed or distracted with their own food offering -- the gyek-tor and lu-tor -- of rather smaller undecorated tormas which are thrown outside for them. Then the various altar offerings are visualized as being transformed into a glorious array of fine foods and wine, perfume and blazing lights and presented with a dedicatory verse. Next the deities themselves are visualized and invited to receive the offerings and finally their tormas are presented.

With the divine power now manifested on the altar before the lama it is possible for him to appropriate some of it for the benefit of the sponsor. The sponsor is called and sent outside to circumambulate the bonfire which is sending clouds of smoke skywards. In his left hand he holds the Dabla toma -- Dabla, the protector of the village land and crops and also associated with warfare -- and in his right the khukri knife, both weapon and tool. He circles the bonfire in a clockwise direction while the lama chants and crashes the cymbals, then returns to the altar and replaces the knife and toma,

this time taking up the yi-dam tormas and the da-dar arrow and again circumambulating the fire. When he has completed this his face and the faces of his family are smeared with flour by the lama, with whom they also touch foreheads. In these ways divine power is transferred directly to the sponsor; from the village god via the knife, emblem of production and protection; from the patron deity via the arrow; and from the Buddha through the medium of the priest. His supply of life-power is reinforced by the intervention of the gods which cannot be obtained except with the assistance of a lama.

The second stage

The comparatively brief morning ritual is complemented by the more elaborate afternoon session. Here the mode of action changes from defence to attack, no longer just appropriating power for the sponsor's benefit but actually using it to banish harmful demons (even if only temporarily) who continuously threaten both the sponsor and religion. This more active coercion of evil forces is undoubtedly one of the factors which enhances the appeal of this type of ceremony for the sponsor.

The new mood is conveyed immediately in the appearance of the fresh altar which is constructed. This time the tormas are made out of cold cooked rice which is painted a vivid red using a dye (koma mar-ti) which is derived from a plant root. Each torma has a pair of sharpened slivers of wood embedded in it on which are impaled morsels of meat, for the gods to be called on are all of the fierce blood-drinking, meat-eating type (towa). (The sacrificial overtones here are too obvious to need dwelling on, but it is worth recording that people do openly recognize these and say that once it used to be necessary to kill a man for these rites, that when that was forbidden yak blood was used but since nowadays people are poor and yaks expensive they must make do with dye.) A great number of tormas are made, some 30 or so, so that the whole altar is a blaze of colour. Although each torma is a similar pyramidal shape, each is individually identified by markings on the front face and by arrangements of smaller dough buttons around the base. Learning the different forms is an important part of the lama's training and the more accomplished masters take great care to produce an artistic and harmonious effect.

The altar table is in the form of a series of raised tiers so the tormas can be arranged in ranks which reproduce the relationship of the deities to one another. On the lateral plane are symbolic associations between gods while the vertical arrangements indicate the hierarchical power structure. As before the topmost row is known as the lama dal and the same structure of Buddha, patron deity and kandoma is preserved, although the personalities are different. The central figure is now Dorje Chang (Skt Vajradhara), the primordial Buddha according to Nyingma-pa thought; the patron deity (vidam) is Khorlo Demchog (Skt Cakra-samvara) and the kandoma is the Diamond Sow Dorje Phamo (Skt Vajra Varahi). Single tormas in this row represent the Three Lords (Manjushri, Vajrapani and Avalokitesvara), the Five Long Life Sisters and other high deities.

The second rank is known as the gon-po dal; these are deities who form the class of protectors of the law (Tib. chos skyong) - gods often of Indian origin who have been adopted into the pantheon. Of these the most significant, indeed the foci of the ritual, are the Four Handed Lord Gonpo Chazhi (Skt Mahakala) and the Glorious Goddess Palten Lhamo, the protectress of Tibet, whose prototype is Durga. Iconographically she is sometimes portrayed:

"surrounded by flames and riding on a white-faced mule, upon a saddle of her own son's skin flayed by herself. She is clad in human skins and is eating human brains and blood from a skull; and she wields in her right hand a trident rod."

(Waddell, 1974: 364-5)

The third tier down, the sung-ma dal, or guardian row, is devoted to lesser guardians of the faith such as the Five Kings (Gyelbo Ku-nga), the planet god Za and Ganesh. Also on this row are placed a variety of tormas with special ritual functions, including the bol-tor, the chö-tor, the kang-tor and the pawo zor (Tib. respectively, 'bul-gtor, mchod-gtor, bskang-gtor, and dpa'bo zor).

At the base of these three tiers are placed various other tormas -- one for the place owners Gupje and Bemje, one for the Bharku village god Meme Jor Tsen, and one made of butter representing the three Hindu deities Mahādeo, Rām and Lakshmi. Other special offerings include the shalse torma (Tib. zhal-zas) -- a special food offering, the ling-a torma and the tormas for the gyek and lū demons (see Fig 9).

As may be imagined, preparation of this complex altar occupies several hours. The ensuing ceremony is longer still, often lasting into the night, as the lama officiant goes through the cycle of chants and offerings which transform the mundane ingredients of the altar into an empowered display of cosmic energy directed to the benefit of the sponsor. The catalysts for this manifestation of divine power are the lama's chanted words, the music and the gestures. Some parts of the ritual have a largely standard form, for example going for refuge in the triple gem of the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Assembly:

"I go for refuge to all the lord buddhas.
I go for refuge to all the sacred doctrines.
I go for refuge to the religious assemblies.
I go for refuge to the dākinis, keepers and
guardians of the doctrine who possess the eye
of knowledge."

(Snellgrove, 1957: 226)

Then the offerings must be consecrated and the deities summoned to receive them. The hindering demons and local spirits must also be diverted from the ceremony by being bought off with their own offerings, the small uninteresting tormas for them being transformed by the texts into a grandiose offering:

"I give this torma, inexhaustible as a space-vast treasury of all sublime desires, agreeable to each individual mind, to the 80,000 families of hindering demons, the fifteen great evil spirits of children, all the families of the lords of disease, lords of epidemic, evil spirits, hindering demons and ghosts, to all the sentient beings included among the six destinies of being, the five classes, the four birthplaces: may there arise and increase -- in accord

with their various wishes - endless enjoyment until this world is emptied out! many they all be freed from their sufferings, and have the opportunity quickly to attain the precious rank of omniscient Buddhahood!

(Beyer, op cit: 343)

In addition to the usual water, food, perfume and other offerings a number of special items are presented to the gods; the food torma or shalse, the gift torma (bol-tor), the offering torma (chü-tor) and the kang-tor, a moulded representation of brains, limbs, penis, heart, tongue and nose. Most interesting of the offerings is the ling-a. This too is moulded from dough like a torma but has the form of a reclining man and is offered up, first to the gods and then to the sponsor of the ritual and the rest of the household, as food. The officiating lama assumes the form of the Lion Faced Dākini Senge Dongchen and summons the demons to take on material form in the ling-a. With the demons embodied, or trapped, in the ling-a the lama takes his magic dagger and plants it in the centre of the torma to the accompaniment of crashing cymbals and a variety of hand gestures, killing the demons. He then takes his diku or magic chopper (Tib. gri-gug) - a curved blade surmounted by a dorje sceptre - and slices the ling-a into bits which are then offered up:

"The flesh, blood and bones
of these liberated enemy evil spirits,
these si of poverty,
their three poisons purified
into a distillation of the nectar of knowledge;
this we offer up to be eaten
by the divine hosts of the mandala;
accept it with raging delight!
perform your active functions
of subjugating and destroying! " (ibid: 316)

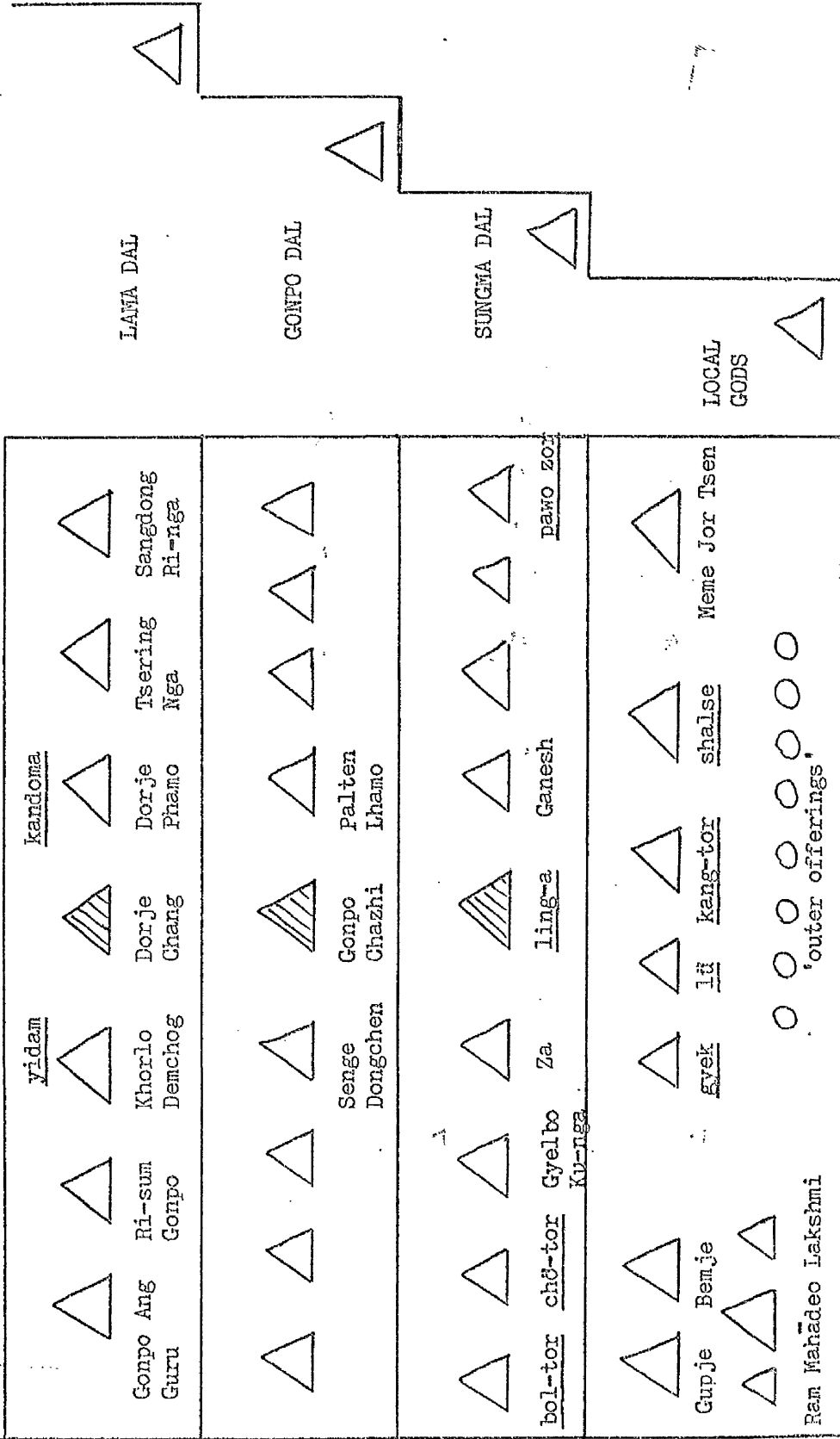
The gods are visualised as consuming the demons and then the remainder is eaten by the lama and by everybody present. This is the only occasion of which I was aware in the full panoply of Buddhist ritual that a normally dangerous and polluting embodiment of the demons is actual eaten by the participants, the ritual evidently having been so powerful that it has neutralised their power.

Having brought the deities, entertained them with the offerings and disposed of the demons, the officiant now proceeds to merge himself with the chief protector Gonpo Chazhi in mystic union, by visualising the deity with such intensity that his own consciousness is replaced by the divine ego (Tib nga rgyal) of the god himself. The lama temporarily is Gonpo Chazhi and as such has divine power over events and the ability to control the dangers of the supernatural world on behalf of his clients:

"all the evil schemes of harm by lha and lā, by ghosts, spirits and flesh-eating demons, by polluters and demons of madness and forgetfulness, by their elders, male and female, by their sons and daughters, by their retinue, male and female, by their servants, by mamo demonesses and evil dākinis, by all misleading demons, by king demons and demons of death, by gongpo and fliers in the sky, by nyen and sadag, by serpents and ogres and nōjin, by all ghosts, by tsen and dū and hungry spirits, by sages and those who hold the magic spells, by planets, constellations, years, months, days, and times, and by all the evil preparations of the all the families of the great evil spirits and hindering demons; may they be pacified! may they not arise! may they not be! may they promise to do them no more!" (ibid: 342)

and in the fine translation by Beyer the text continues in the same vein for many more lines averting every conceivable harm and evil.

The ritual is concluded with final acts of prayer and offering and the altar display is at last dismantled. The now magically empowered tormas are removed by the sponsor who retains those of Gonpo Chazhi and Palten Lhamo for his own consumption and arranges for the rest to be distributed to his kinsmen and neighbours. These should not be eaten until the day after the ritual. Altogether the two sections of the ritual will have occupied 10 or 12 hours including preparation, for some passages are repeated many times and the offerings made over and over again, so that the account given here is necessarily much shortened.



Sideview

Fig 9 - The second Buddhist altar for the Protectors

The Buddhist pantheon

It was shown above how, from the perspective of the birth-god rite in its local, traditional version, the deities of the ritual form a hierarchy based on control of territorial enclaves. By taking the structure of the Buddhist lha söl altar as another prototype I wish to show how the Buddhist pantheon is based on quite different principles.

Various attempts have been made to suggest the structure of the pantheon in a Tibetan context (e.g. Samuel, 1978) without achieving a definitive statement. In part this is due to the fluidity of the different levels or classes of deities, whose individual members may reappear in a variety of different contexts. For example, the Lion-faced Dakini (Senge Dongchen) often appears in the highest grouping while the Five Long-life Sisters are usually assigned to a position as more minor protectors. In the rite just discussed their positions are reversed. Despite this sort of movement there is a discernible structure which regulates the pantheon, determining both the interrelationship of particular deities in the whole, and their individual functioning. My concern here is with the pattern as viewed from the perspective of village ritual, rather than with the finer points of classification which might exercise the Tibetan theologian.

At the head of the pantheon comes the celestial Buddha-figure who always occupies the centre of the topmost (lama) row of the altar and receives the largest, most elaborate and decorative tormas. The actual personality of this figure may vary according to the particular ritual: here it is Dorje Chang in the second phase of the ritual and Shakya Thubpa in the first. Often it may be Opame (Amitābha) or Guru Rinpoche (Padmasambhava). Theologically of course they each have quite different characters with specific mythological backgrounds and iconographical representations. But from the villagers' standpoint they rank together as the most senior deities. To ask which of them is the most important is either regarded as ludicrous or receives as many answers as there are respondents for in different contexts they are all equally significant/powerful.

In the second group, only just below the celestial Buddhas in importance, come the patron deities (yi-dam), the bodhisattvas and the dakinis (kando-ma) who flank the supreme Buddha on the altar dis-

play. These include deities such as Chenrezi, Khorlo Demchog, Hevajra, Dorje Phamo and so on. Although each is distinctive in terms of individual functions, from a structural point of view they all occupy the same rank. In terms of the altar they also appear on the 'lama' row and indeed are closely associated with the officiating lama who employs their powers in the course of the ritual.

In the third category come the gon-po or protectors. In the present ritual the most vivid examples are Gonpo Chazhi and Palten Lhamo but many others are also encountered. Often these deities are based on Hindu prototypes - Mahākāla, Durga etc. - and usually appear as they do here in their most violent form.

The fourth class comprises the sung-ma or guardian deities, either Indian gods of a lower rank or indigenous Tibetan godlings associated at one time with a particular locale who have now gained a more general acceptance. Ganesh, the Five Kings and Za all come in this category.

Below this group but not always clearly distinguished from it are the truly local godlings associated with particular mountains, villages or shrines. Included here are Dabla, god of Syabru, Meme Jor Tsen, god of Bharku, and the Gupje/Bemje pair. From the Buddhist point of view all of these, like those in the fourth class, are said to have been converted either peacefully or after violent contest by Guru Rinpoche during his extensive travels in the Himalayas subduing the forces of anti-religion. That he did not entirely succeed is shown by the continuing presence of the final category, the many different varieties of demons who still lurk untamed on the margins of village life. The full pantheon can be represented thus:

<u>Sphere</u>	<u>Class</u>	<u>Examples</u>
Supramundane	1 Supreme celestial Buddha (inc. Guru of lineage)	Opame, Dorje Chang, Guru Rinpoche
	2 Patron deities, dakinis & bodhisattvas.	Khorlo Demchog, Chenrezi, Dorje Phamo
	3 Protectors (<u>gon-po</u>)	Palten Lhamo, Gonpo Chazhi
	4 Guardians (<u>sung-ma</u>)	Ganesh, Za
Mundane	5 Local godlings	Dabla, Gupje
	6 Demons	

Fig. 10 The Buddhist pantheon

Conclusion

Superficially the alternative versions, Buddhist and shamanic, of the lha söl supplication to the local gods have a certain amount in common. Both involve the construction of altars which represent and embody the divine powers, and both require the mediation of a trained religious specialist who channels supernatural powers for the benefit of his client. Certain symbolic themes and contrasts are common to both, for example male and female as complementary forces, and the correlation of white and red with moods of peace and wrath and attitudes of tranquility and energy. But when one comes to look beneath the surface of the ritual it is clear that in more striking ways the two versions are based on quite different ways of relating to the supernatural. Indeed, although the Buddhist version masquerades as a supplication it in fact has transformed the ritual into one of coercion and power. It is predominantly concerned with keeping the territorial deities in check, reminding them in effect that their own existence is conditional upon their fulfilling the oath (Tib. dam can) binding them to the protection of Buddhism. If they step out of line superior forces can be ranged against them, as an invocation to one of the most senior territorial deities, the God of the Plain, makes clear:

"You were bound to the bond of your word by Padma-sambhava of Urgyen. So hearken now to what is required of you.

.....[there follows a list of requests].....

If you do not protect us living beings now in this last world-age, Will you perhaps be mindful of these happenings:

.....[there follows a list of threats] (Snellgrove, 1957: 241)

As Snellgrove notes, the territorial gods are treated alternately to threats and offerings (perhaps in line with their rather ambivalent status as both benevolent and dangerous on occasions) but "In no way are they permitted to interfere with the Buddhist doctrine to which they remain helplessly subject. In no sense can they be said to have perverted it or forced it to compromise" (ibid 242). Their inferior position is symbolized in the way they are placed right at the bottom of the Buddhist altar where Gupje and Bemje are added almost as an afterthought. The ritual recapitulates the historical triumph of Buddhist ideology over the indigenous religion, but more immediately for its present-day followers it serves as a reminder of the power of Buddhist values and the lamas who implement

them in the context of village life not only to subdue the demons but to keep the local godlings under control. It is the lama who, with the tools of Buddhist doctrine and ritual, can be relied on to maintain the natural order as much as the cosmic order.

By contrast the tribal lha söl (and the village god worship) reject this implicit subordination of the territorial gods to Buddhist control. It accepts the dependency of village life on the natural forces with which it interacts and honours the territorial gods as the supports on which village life depends - an attitude of respect which is symbolized in the altar which raises them above all others, even Durga and Siva who play only a minor role. It is here that one finds a powerful sense of man's location in a personified environment in which harmonious relationships with nature and with the supernatural are inextricably bound together. As an illustration one may cite the text of a Tamang village-god ceremony collected by Höfer in which the gods (here Mahādeo and Devi) are requested:

"Résidez dignement et pour toujours dans le sol sur lequel
s'élèvent les maisons, à l'intérieur du beau terroir! Ne nous
imposez pas de jalousie; ne nous imposez pas d'excitation par
une parole sournoise; entourez d'un enclos protégeant la récolte!
Salut." "

(Höfer, 1972: 166)

The two different ceremonies put forward alternate views of nature - on the one hand nature as a support on which man is dependent but over which he has only a tenuous control, and on the other, nature as open to magical manipulation on behalf of men by supernatural forces.

The tenacity with which the Shangba clan clings to the cult of the local gods may be put down to a refusal to accede their once pre-eminent position in the village to others. The present senior lineage member of the clan was once the leader of the pañcāyat and his father before him was a wealthy, influential man, but their wealth and prestige have since been dissipated by turning to drink and gambling, and quarrelling with other villagers. Through re-emphasizing their ties with Gupje in whose territory Syabru lies and asserting their position as the founding clan of the village they may see a way of retaining their status in the face of the Teba and Kamarpa clans who have come to dominate village affairs, and who universally perform the Buddhist version of the supplication of the birth-god.

Despite the best efforts of religious specialists to enlist the aid of supernatural forces for protection in one of these ways it often happens that misfortune strikes nevertheless. What can be done in such a situation? The next chapter goes on to examine further protective rituals and divinatory procedures used by shamans and lamas and then goes on to consider those where the emphasis changes from protection to attack - the exorcistic rituals.

Notes to Chapter 4

(1) The significance of this name remains puzzling. Properly it is presumably Tshangs dkar-po, an epithet of the Hindu god Brahma and also an aspect of the srung-ma guardian deity Pe har (who is in fact the clan god of the Løpcens). But these associations were not brought out by the storytellers. Perhaps for them the name merely has a pleasing homonymic resemblance to that of the founding clan, the Shangbas and serves to re-emphasise the symbol of whiteness (karpo; Tib dkar-po) which plays a key part in the myths and rituals surrounding Gupje.

(2) Dabla is the colloquial pronunciation of a class of deities - the dgra lha (or dgra bla) or 'enemy gods' - who in Tibetan thought are believed to be especially capable of protecting their worshippers against enemies and of helping them to increase their property (see Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975: 318). See also Höfer, 1981 on the role of the Dablas in Dhading district.

(3) This homage is formalised in the political sphere by the process of čākari which, as Borgström notes, is a key term with regard to the creation and maintenance of vertical personal relations: "It refers to the process involved in a supplicant's always being at the service of the person from whom he wants a favour, and whose client he wants to become. He also gives small gifts to the person concerned and shows his respect in other ways". (Borgström, 1980: 37-8)

CHAPTER FIVE

EXORCISTIC RITUALS AND THE CONTROL OF SICKNESS AND MISFORTUNE

It would seem that where the cult of the territorial deities is concerned Buddhism has eclipsed the indigenous religious system or even appropriated it for its own purposes. Indeed, it has been argued that, given the many overtly shamanic aspects of the Buddhist lha söl, the deity Gonpo Chazhi and the celebrant who unites with him may best be considered as neo-shamans (Stablein, 1976); in other words this form of the ritual embodies a more advanced stage of shamanism which has moved beyond its pre-literate origins. However this hypothesis be regarded, it is still the case that the Tamangs maintain a clear separation between the roles of shaman and lama, continue to employ both and regard both as fulfilling essential, but different, aspects of their religion. To see how it is that the shamanic tradition has retained sufficient distinctiveness to allow it to endure alongside Buddhist orthodoxy one must turn to another aspect of religious life where the shaman comes into his own - that of divination and apotropaic ritual.

Although every household begins the year with the full ration of protection that the religious specialists can provide, things inevitably will not run entirely smoothly for them. There will be quarrels and bad blood between neighbours, unaccountable illness, runs of bad luck, maybe even sudden death. Although the layman realises that these misfortunes result from disturbed relations with various metaphysical forces, the particular causes lying behind them are opaque, clouded by the egotistic limitations of his own consciousness. To penetrate behind the symptomatic display to the true cause of the events which affect his life requires the specialised services of a religious practitioner who is able to transcend these limitations and operate on the level of the divine powers - an ability which is acquired through special processes

of selection and training. Thus it is commonly said that lamas can 'see' the Buddhist deities, while shamans are believed to meet with their familiar spirits. Occasionally this hidden world will break through into the layman's consciousness, as when he meets a ghost along the trail or stumbles on a convocation of witches in a lonely place, but these are random and uncontrolled encounters unlike the purposeful ones of the specialist.

As a prelude to the account of various exorcistic rituals, both Buddhist and shamanic, I examine Tamang ideas of illness and health and their connection with metaphysical forces, and describe various diagnostic techniques which are employed.

The aetiology of affliction

The Tamang theory of illness develops from a view of the inter-relationship between bodily dysfunction, social disharmony, incorrect action in previous lives and the potentially malevolent metaphysical aspects of the person, in particular his mind and consciousness. This 'background theory' is then objectified in the actions of particular witches, ghosts, demons and godlings who are seen as the immediate cause of the affliction.

There is thus a distinction made between symptoms, anterior causes and predisposing factors. Afflictions themselves are divided into broad categories, namely being ill (nā-pa), being mad (myō-pa) Tib. myos-pa) and being possessed (lha wane-pa). Symptoms are distinguished between those which are internal and those which are external. The internal symptoms on the whole give much more cause for concern and require more elaborate curative techniques. In this category are such complaints as headache, fever and lassitude, coughs and respiratory diseases, stomach pains and diarrhoea. External symptoms include skin diseases, goitre, eye diseases and accidental burns, bites and cuts which in general can be treated by a minor specialist with a simple ceremony. Even this generalization must be qualified however, for some serious causative agencies may indicate their activity through external symptoms. The prime examples of this sort of attack are the burns caused by fire-demons, and the bruises which witches leave on their victims.

The body is conceptualized as being formed out of five constituent elements, the jungwa nga (Tib. 'byung-wa lnga), which are said to be fire, air, earth and water to which is added a fifth, space.

These elements are themselves called 'gods' (lha) and correspond as much to the metaphysical principles underlying the universe as to the material substances themselves. The body is formed from the total pool of elements and at death the cremation ensures the return of the elements to the pool. During life the body is animated by the action of bu or breath, corresponding to the Indian tradition of prāṇa. (1) Both birth and death are occasions when the body becomes polluted, this pollution (resp. ke-tip and shi-tip) communicating itself also to other members of the household who are briefly restricted in their dealings with other members of the community: they should not stay in anyone else's house nor prepare food for guests for three days after the birth or death (2).

Birth and death are not the only occasions when bodily processes may be inauspicious for the self or others. The waste products of the body at any time are a source of pollution which can be used in mystical attack if they fall into the hands of an aggressor. Excreta, hair clippings, nail parings and the 'smell' adhering to old clothes are all potential weapons and must be carefully disposed of, lest they fall into the hands of a witch or black shaman who could use them to make the person ill or to poison others. Moreover excreta is particularly dangerous to children before the age of puberty; they should never handle the removal and spreading of the midden refuse on the fields, for contact with it is a well-established cause of idiocy and dumbness (lemba).

The person as he goes through life is continually performing actions the outcome of which is either good or sinful. The residue of these good and bad deeds (lopi-pāp) is karma, or one's present existential fate, which in popular terms is thought to be directly related to a favourable balance of meritorious acts over sins either in the past or in a previous life. Thus present misfortunes such as infertility, deformed children or persistent bad luck with economic affairs - that is to say, long-term problems rather than acute illnesses - are sometimes blamed on a misspent past. It is also often casually said that the good fortune which someone else enjoys in terms of wealth or life-style must be the reward for a wellspent previous life, whereas one's own poverty and difficulties indicate a sinful past. It is a common pleasantry to indicate or account for a particular affinity with someone in terms of 'we must have been brothers in a previous life'.

What is curiously unorthodox about the popular theory of karma is that whereas traditionally its effects are limited to the particular person to whom it applies, here the sins of the fathers are frequently visited upon the children. In fact, a parallel explanatory principle seems to be operating, to the effect that because of a man's own sins members of his family have been affected (cf. Sharma, 1973: 351). Two of the cases known to me included the idiot son of a powerful 'black' shaman and the mad wife of a magician-lama - both afflictions being regarded as the result of the evil actions and possible deaths caused by the man in question in his pursuit of power.

The repository of karmic forces is the namshe (Tib. rnam-shes), or consciousness, which is successively incarnated at birth and disembodied at death, passing through an intermediate state (Tib. bardo) on its progress towards one of the many heavens or hells or towards rebirth. During life it is, as it were, firmly attached to the person, separating only at the moment of death but retaining a linkage to the body until finally sent on its way by the ministrations of the lamas during the death ceremony. But occasionally, for one reason or another, this procedure fails and the consciousness becomes trapped in the intermediate state as a death-demon or shinde (Tib. gshi-'dre), either because the death ceremony was omitted or improperly performed, so that the namshe became deluded into believing the intermediate state to be a desirable one, or because the death was an inauspicious one or the karma particularly evil. Once trapped in this in-between state the death-demon, driven by karmic forces, lurks around the place of death waiting to cause harm. They are found particularly at crossroads near the village and in the vicinity of cremation sites. A number of people claim to have seen them, hovering just at the limits of perception "shimmering like a rainbow". They are frequently identified as the cause of illness, although it does not seem that their activity can be clearly distinguished from that of demons and sprites of non-human origin (3).

Unlike the consciousness, the sem (Tib. sems) or mind is present only during life and is rather weakly anchored to the body, inclined to wander off of its own accord. Evidence of this is available to anyone (and often commented on) in the form of dreams when the mind visits other places, meets other people - even the dead, and in general appears not to be fully under the control of

its owner. In certain circumstances, because of these features, the mind can become positively harmful and its actions are often found at the bottom of various interpersonal difficulties. It can operate in two main ways - the 'evil eye' and witchcraft. In the first case it is not the metaphor of the glance which is actually used but of the voice, standing for the thoughts of the assailant, this being known as mi-kha - defamatory talk or back-biting. Back-biting is an ever-present danger in one's dealings with other people, corresponding perhaps to a fear of being over-critically assessed or enviously regarded by one's neighbours. Thus people may come into the home and eye one's possessions covetously, or they may be displeased with the hospitality which is offered them, or they may compare one's domestic or financial arrangements unfavourably with their own. All of these result from the action of a harmful sem, indicating again the distinction which is drawn between 'symptoms' (in this case, objective behaviour) and causes. Since nobody can ever be quite sure who their enemies are the ritual to discover whether mi-kha is 'attached' is one of the most frequently performed (see below).

However, an ill-disposed sem can act in a much more malign way than through mere back-biting, as evinced in the activity of boksi (N) or witches (also known as s'ŋ-de). Witches are invariably women whose sem is thought to travel to the home of the chosen victim, often by night, and which characteristically acts by 'biting' (N - tokne) the victim while asleep, leaving a large angry bruise. Thus one woman related how she had been sitting on her courtyard sorting and drying maize cobs when she had been bitten by a witch on the leg and a large angry bruise had appeared at once. Their victims are almost always women, occasionally babies (because they are jealous, being infertile themselves) - this is usually the cause of sudden unwarranted crying by children in the night, and only rarely men. Witches are also thought to be poisoners.

A distinction can be drawn between witchcraft which is thought to be a permanent and hereditary attribute of certain women, and the accusation of witchcraft which is a frequent ploy in quarrels between women. In the latter case accusations of 'boksi' are freely bandied about and often mean little more than a curse or imprecation in the heat of the moment. In more serious cases the accusation can be an important tactic in the struggle to outface an opponent. Thus my next-door neighbour, in the midst of a long-

standing and wide-ranging quarrel with her husband's former wife, one morning publicly exhibited the bruises on her chest with the clear (although unspoken) implication that her enemy was responsible.

These loud and public accusations in the context of specific disputes need to be clearly distinguished from much more covert -- although community-wide -- beliefs about a specific group of women, which people are generally extremely reluctant to air in public. These relate to a group of nine women originating from Helambu who have married into the village. Five of them are the daughters of a single woman who is believed to have passed on her knowledge to all of them. Witchcraft in this context is thus comparable to the ability to become a shaman or a lama -- the outcome of a combination of hereditary disposition and training. In turn any daughters of the present so-called witches will also become witches. Although the powers of these women are widely known and feared -- many people say they will not eat in their houses for fear of being poisoned -- they are not noticeably ostracized from social life. People are prepared to recognise that the activity of the sem (mind) is to some extent involuntary and is separable from other attributes of the person. A propensity to witchcraft can no more be denied than a shamanic vocation or a divinatory ability, although of course it is important to avoid getting on the wrong side of someone with such powers. As for the women believed to be witches, they not surprisingly bitterly resent the way they are regarded but since they are rarely accused to their faces -- both for fear of their vengeance and because of the heavy penalties provided for under Nepalese law for the accusing or maltreatment of witches (Macdonald, 1976a) -- there is nothing they can do to clear their name. This pattern of belief seems to be a classic case of outsiders becoming scapegoats (see Szasz, 1973): the Helambu women come from far away, most belong to another tribe (Sherpa) and have few kinship ties integrating them into the village.

This survey indicates but does not exhaust the range of afflictions which may be attributed to physical defilement, interpersonal malice or an evil way of life as mediated through pollution and through the actions of the consciousness and mind. In addition there is a condition of soul-loss when a further non-physical aspect of the person known as the la is temporarily dis-

located, often following an encounter with the supernatural and leading to a temporary state of madness or depression. How the la is conceptually distinguished from the mind and consciousness is not at present clear. Then there is the unpredictable malevolence of the rock, tree and water dwelling demons to be coped with and the anger of the locality gods when they have been neglected or slighted. To these may be added various unclassifiable causes, such as the evil demons associated with fire, water and wood (me-sa, chu-sa, shing-sa). The speciality of the me-sa or fire demons is sending people into a daze, particularly at the time of the new and full moons, so that they fall into the fire and burn themselves, while wood-demons are responsible for twisting people's features or their necks and backs so that they become misshapen and hunchbacked. These spirits are always represented during the shaman's protection rites when they are offered milk, but never liquor or blood. Then there is the effect of eclipses (known as lang wopkyel - the suffering moon) which if seen by pregnant women will cause them to miscarry or give birth to a monstrous child. There is a theory of lucky and unlucky days and of planetary influences which can all play a part in the causation of affliction.

Thus illness, madness, death and disaster are never seen as random or natural events - they are invariably the result of a specific attack against a pre-selected victim. If the range of potential aggressors seems to indicate a paranoid streak to Tamang life this is not entirely unfounded. Of course people do not go around in fear and trembling at the thought of the disasters which could befall them, but they do indicate in many small gestures and comments the extreme caution with which they regard both the natural and social worlds. For example, nobody goes walking alone in the countryside if he can avoid it, not only because of the objective dangers of attack by boar or bear, but because of fear of the spirits of the forest. The countryside is littered with little cairns on passes, good luck symbols, flags on bushes and hills to ward off the demons which cause mountain sickness and to placate the mountain gods who guard the passes. People gather up their hair clippings to make sure witches do not get hold of them, avoid eating in the home of known witches for fear of poisoning and guard against theft with huge mastiffs and double-locked doors. They continually suspect their neighbours of stealing their property, of envious desires or of gossiping behind their backs. Wealth or good fortune are never publicly

displayed or shared, rather they are hidden away in cavernous chests where prying eyes will not see them (with regard to the Sherpas Ortner (op cit) speaks of their 'anti-penetration symbols' which seem to betray a rather similar attitude).

To a certain extent these beliefs are founded in objective fact in that life is generally hard and dangerous and death swift and remorseless. The natural world is a threat in that landslides, wild animals and bad weather can bring ruin. In the social domain village life is both intimate and the arena for all sorts of petty quarrels; privacy as such is unknown and people do gossip continually about others. One can also speculate that these attitudes are fuelled by circumstances in the less remote sense that the pattern of social relations is likely to magnify whatever personal animosities already exist. One thinks of the fact that an ever-increasing population is competing for fixed resources and that they do so in terms of households as economic units. The household is at once conceptually an independent unit and necessarily dependent on outside assistance if it is to survive. 'Neighbourliness' is the glue which holds the two contradictory notions together and it is here that infringements are most prone to arise and most harshly regarded; anyone thought to be mean, selfish or stand-offish is likely to become a target of his neighbours' suspicions and bad blood may develop.

Diagnosis and treatment

Although the theory of causes and predisposing factors is very wide-ranging, covering the whole gamut of what we understand by illness and extending into the field of social relations also, it also lacks precision. Except in a few obvious cases (such as 'witch-bites') it is difficult to find any standard association of specific afflictions with specific causes. Tamang concepts of illness are apparently not integrated into a tightly-knit system but have more the character of a broad framework of meaning within which responsibility for a particular diagnosis lies with the appropriate specialist, not only because (from the emic point of view) he has, by definition, access to the putative answer, but because (from the etic point of view) he invests the situation with cultural meaning. The framework at once constrains the range of possible interpretations but gives to the curer a certain freedom

to choose within it his own diagnosis in conjunction with the client, with whose problems he is probably quite familiar in such a small face-to-face community (4). As Parkin (1979) emphasises, specifying what the problems are and clarifying them may be an essential component of the search for a solution to them.

In attempting to identify the particular causative agency responsible for the attack the diviner-cum-healer will place at the forefront of his enquiries the concept of the 'life power' (lung-ta) of his client. This, unlike our essentially empty category of 'health' as an absence of disease, is a positive quality which all individuals possess in varying measure. It is the strength of the life power which provides resistance to mystical attack. Life power is not a fixed stock but a fluctuating force which tends to be dissipated by things like encounters with witches, ghosts and snakes, or by dangerous astrological configurations, but it can be recharged by appropriate rituals or by charms, amulets, blessings and life-pills. Thus the individual's state of health or sickness is seen as being connected to his relationship with the cosmos; the two are linked as microcosm and macrocosm. Encounters with supernatural evil or cosmological disturbances diminish the life power and lay the person open to attack. The healer's first task is to reverse this process, firstly by identifying and exorcising the cause of the attack, secondly by providing the sufferer with increased life power by tapping it at source - from the gods themselves. Rather than diagnosis, treatment and cure the Tamang healer's tools are divination, exorcism and magical protection.

At least five methods of divination are commonly employed under the direction of three types of specialists to identify the force responsible for weakening the life power. At the most general level are those used by the soothsayers (sang-dung) of whom there are six in the village (5). (The soothsayer also has a curative technique which consists of 'blowing' a mantra (syllable of power) on to the affected area in the case of external symptoms and applying a clay poultice. This procedure is repeated three times daily until the condition improves and, being cheap and easy to arrange with none of the

organisation required for a full-scale healing ritual, it is often the first line of defence. The mantra blower has no special training other than the mastery of his particular sacred formula and relies on his reputation for gaining results. The income from such an aptitude being negligible it is performed more as a sort of community service than for personal gain. As far as I could discover the soothsayer does not use other herbal remedies or poultices despite the area being an important source of several varieties of plants used in ayurvedic medicine which the local people themselves export to Trisuli for sale. In fact the only traces of herbalist interest were in the use of dry-cell battery acid as a disinfectant and of asphalt as a covering for wounds, particularly of cattle.)

Two mechanical techniques are used by the soothsayer. The first uses two pieces of bark called bong-mar and bich, one lighter than water and the other heavier. By placing the two pieces in a glass of water and observing the relative positions they take up one skilled in the art can determine whether the omens are favourable or not for a particular course of action. In the second, the rosary beads which most men own may be used in a similar mechanical way to determine whether one is prone to disease or whether disasters are about to strike or whether an affair will turn out well. (6).

A third method known as tsi (Tib. rtsis) is employed by the lamas and uses an astrological almanac (N - patra) printed in Kathmandu which details the phases of the moon, eclipses and favourable and unfavourable days, dates, directions and actions. They are mainly resorted to following a death in order to determine the time and place of cremation but are also used to warn of impending dangers such as eclipses and can be consulted at any time to discover whether a project will succeed or a journey be safely accomplished. A fourth type known as mu-tsi is performed by the shaman during certain ceremonies while in a trance state. Anyone wishing a 'reading' presents a packet of grain and a rupee note to the shaman, who offers the grain to his tutelary spirits and then relays a prophecy concerning death and illness, success, money and marriage prospects and so on, but always in carefully veiled terms so that the recipient is left to fill in the outline himself. This is always enjoyed by the audience who laugh uproariously at some of the stranger predictions made about one of their number.

One of the most interesting and most frequently performed divinatory rites is the search to discover if one is the victim of mi-kha (gossip or back-biting). As has been seen this is one of the clearest cases of an interaction between disordered social relationships and physical illness, for it is always the concomitant of jealousy or greed. Although part of the shaman's stock-in-trade this rite involves no ecstatic trance (although it does require divine assistance) and ^{can} equally well be performed by a sufficiently accomplished soothsayer. The rite takes about 20 minutes and involves laying out a grain-sifting basket with an uncooked egg in the centre and a scattering of maize, flour, chillies, and pieces of cloth around it in a mandala-like pattern. The soothsayer chants while offering serkim, the libation of beer and incense, to the local gods and invites them to come and indicate whether the client is a victim or not. The egg is then removed to the doorway of the house where it is placed under an upturned basket with a stone on top and ladlefuls of liquor thrown at it. The egg is then broken and the yolk carefully examined by the soothsayer and the client for the telltale little red marks which indicate that there is mi-kha. Since the marks are either objectively present or not the soothsayer has little opportunity to manipulate the result, but if they are discovered he will then aid the client to identify the exact source of the gossip and suggest ways of combatting it. Often of course the client will have his own ideas about the guilty party and the soothsayer is doing no more than confirming his suspicions. Thus in one case a young man's baby nephew fell ill after his house was visited by a woman known to be a witch, so he had the rite conducted to check that she was indeed responsible. The procedure to discover mi-kha is probably performed four or five times a month in the village and at least once a year by every household not excepting those of the lamas themselves for it appears that no other method can achieve its results. I have seen three households perform it in the course of single morning's work by the Syabru shaman who derives a useful income of five rupees every time he conducts it.

At a more elaborate level divination and cure can be combined in a single ceremony known as la tenkin or 'bringing (back) the soul' which necessitates a full shamanic trance and occupies several hours(?). The cause of the affliction is discovered during the course of the shaman's ecstasy, the client's soul is restored to

him and a suitable course of action recommended to prevent a relapse.

As an example of this ceremony one may cite the la tenkin performed by the Syabru/^{shaman} for a middle-aged man named Pemba who was suffering from severe stomach pains - probably an ulcer. He had already had readings of Buddhist texts carried out by the lamas without result and a bound volume of scriptures was prominently placed in front of his household altar. (Patients typically sample a variety of treatments if a cure is not immediately forthcoming. Unlike the western patient, or at any rate his doctor, who can come to accept that there is no cure for his condition or that the prognosis is very poor, it is here virtually axiomatic that a cure can be achieved if the causative agency is correctly identified and powerful enough magic is used against it. Obviously this can lead to tremendous squandering of resources in truly hopeless cases.)

The shaman arrived in the evening and after a meal with the household began to prepare a small altar set apart from the household Buddhist altar. On this he arranged a mirror and a da-dar arrow, some small tormas and the offerings of an egg, some grain, some beer and juniper smoke. The Syabru shaman was atypical in that he wore no special costume and did not make use of the drum or a plate to provide a rhythmic accompaniment to his chanting. Nevertheless he went into a trance state almost immediately, bouncing up and down on his heels, shaking, whistling and grunting: the gods had very definitely arrived (lha wang-pa). After about half-an-hour of chanting he paused for a rest and a cigarette, then began a mu-tsi fortune-telling session for the 10 or so friends and neighbours of the sponsor who had gathered. After further chanting he plucked a lump of butter apparently out of thin air and placed it on the sponsor's head, so concluding the ceremony.

This bald description is not really intelligible until one considers what it is the shaman is chanting during the performance and how the sequence of events is organised. A synopsis of the tape-recording shows the following sequence (on hearing the tape the shaman denies any recollection of what he has said):

- 1) offering of beer and incense to the Great Gurus (Mahārājā-Mahārāni) and the Gurus of the Four Directions;
- 2) obtains protection for himself during the ritual;
- 3) travels throughout the area requesting the gods to attend the seance

and to protect the house from attack by evil forces;

- 4) is possessed by several gods in turn;
- 5) talks in the 'secret' language of his gurus;
- 6) the god reveals the cause of the sponsor's illness - a combination of soul-loss and angry demons;
- 7) the shaman uses the butter to increase the life-power of his client and recommends a course of treatment - the wearing of amulets and the commissioning of prayers by lamas and shamans.

The first section follows the same pattern as in other rituals, only here it is the shaman's tutelary spirits who are worshipped; his gurus are given hinduized names (great king/great queen), while the mention of the gurus of the four directions locates the ritual in a physical dimension which is protected from attack by demons. The second part emphasizes the great personal danger which the shaman will undergo in the seance - in particular the loss of his own mind which is placed in a lake of clear water guarded by helping spirits. This concern with purification and protection at the start of the ritual has obvious parallels with the Buddhist gods of the four directions who delineate and protect the physical space in which the ritual takes place and with the Buddhist formula of refuge which is supposed to purify the participants' minds in preparation for the ritual.

In the third section the bombo undertakes the journey which is one of the most striking features of shamanic performances throughout the world. Here the spirit world he visits is not the underworld as in the so-called classic tradition but the supernatural terrain associated with the local landscape, the world of the masters of the earth, the locality gods, the rock and water dwelling demons. He ranges through this landscape inviting a huge selection of gods to attend the ritual - the local, village and forest gods, the sun and moon gods (dawa-nyima), the gods of the seasons, the gods of Gosai-kund lake and of the villages round about, and all the significant gods between Kyirong and Kathmandu, such as those at Chilime, at Thangmujet, at Kallari, at Gokarna and in Helambu. But in the fourth section, having focused the attention of the gods on the house where the ritual is being conducted and having brought a selection to the altar the ecstatic journey ends and a period of spirit possession begins. Several gods in turn come to the shaman and speak through him. One of these accuses him of being a fraudulent shaman

because he does not have the costume and drum usually associated with his profession. This is a suspicion also occasionally voiced in the village where, although he continues to be employed nevertheless, there is a certain amount of doubt about the authenticity of his antecedents and training. Another god becomes angered at the comments of people in the audience who are showing insufficient respect and in a frenzy the shaman bites on a brass plate and then hurls it across the room with his teeth. Then another more kindly disposed god asks for clean water so that he may identify the demon responsible for attacking the sponsor. Clearly the shaman employs a number of strategies designed to manipulate his audience and to legitimise his own authority.

The interesting point about the third and fourth sections is the way the Tamang bombo combines both aspects of the shamanic role - the ritual journey and spirit possession. For Eliade it is the ecstatic journey which is the defining feature of shamanism (1972: 5), while in a useful paper Allen (1974) draws attention to the ritual journey as an ethnographic category in its own right, extending beyond the boundaries of shamanism to various other non-ecstatic rites. But here, although the shaman's journey is in part concerned with locating and returning the lost la of the patient, it is not the underworld he visits but the local landscape familiar to his audience. Other students have emphasised the spirit possession aspect of shamanism rather than the ecstatic journey (Firth, 1969; Jones, 1976; Lewis, 1971), concentrating on those elements which relate to the incorporation of non-human spirits by the shaman who also serves as a mouthpiece of the gods. In the fourth section one sees this aspect of the shaman's performance but again somewhat modified - he is not completely 'taken over' by the spirits but maintains a sort of schizoid dialogue with them, at one moment speaking as a god, expressing the god's anger at an imagined slight etc., but at another making requests to the gods and relaying their statements.

The definition of shamanism which Reinhard has put forward, giving equal weight to both the ecstatic journey and to spirit possession, seems to be particularly appropriate to the Tamang case:

"A shaman is a person who at his will can enter into a non-ordinary psychic state (in which he either has his soul undertake a journey to the spirit world or he becomes possessed by

a spirit) in order to make contact with the spirit world on behalf of members of his community" (1976: 16).

The Tamang shaman combines both these aspects with the possession element clearly not a spontaneous outburst but an integral part of the ritual structure firmly under his control.

The fifth section is one in which he speaks in the 'language of the gurus', a sort of idioglossia which is unintelligible to the audience and, one suspects, to the shaman himself since he refuses to translate it subsequently. This use of a secret language is a typical feature of shamanic performances (Eliade, *op. cit.*: 96ff.) and here is perhaps not unrelated to the lamaist use of secret mantras or nonreferential words of power.

In the sixth section the gods reveal the causes of the client's illness - the loss of his la following an encounter with a snake (? or water sprite) on the trail which weakened his vital force or life-power (lung-ta) and an attack by angry demons. In the final section efforts are made to increase the life-power of the sufferer through the application of butter consecrated and empowered by the gods and to maintain his resistance to this sort of attack in the future he is told that he must worship the local gods with beer and incense. Furthermore he is advised to keep his body clean, to make gifts to the lamas and to wear protective amulets around his neck.

Shamanic exorcism

Already in the la tenkin rite we see that the shaman's role goes beyond that of merely applying a technique to the treatment of the sponsor; he is able to penetrate the deeper reality lying behind the everyday world of ordinary men in order to divine causes and recommend cures with the assistance of the gods themselves.

The powers of the most fully accomplished shamans are even more extensive, for they can do battle with and vanquish the forces of evil themselves, rooting out and destroying the demons who have brought sickness or misfortune. A variety of exorcisms are performed, known by the general term mang kla-pa - 'to expel ghosts'. The one selected for more detailed description here is known as kurim (Tib. sku-rim), one of the most elaborate of all Tamang rituals. It is tremendously taxing for the shaman himself, who works continuously for about 14 hours right through the night, and it invariably attracts

large audiences who participate almost to the same extent as the sponsor himself. It goes far beyond a mere protection rite, incorporating drama, magic, fortune-telling and personal renewal. Its culmination is the destruction of the demons on a hillside at dawn, but before that point is reached a number of self-contained dramatic scenes are played out. The kurim (a term usually applied in other societies to Buddhist ceremonies) is commonly performed by a number of households soon after Tibetan New Year in February.

The ceremony takes place within a bounded temporal framework, for it must commence after dusk has fallen and end as the sun rises over the mountains. Like the rituals discussed in the previous chapter this one also centres on an elaborate altar-piece which reveals a great deal about the structural principles which organise the spirit world of the shaman. The altar consists of over 50 tormas and is constructed in the man's section of the house near the hearth on bamboo mats against a backdrop of pine and juniper branches. The tormas, unlike the large white pliable ones of the clan god ceremonies or the solid multi-coloured Buddhist type, are small hard dark-brown flour constructions with many spikey arms and legs, some having 3 or 9 heads. Each is given its appropriate offering - a coin pressed into the belly, a piece of meat, daubs of butter or an egg. The altar is completed by the addition of a knife, a mirror in which to see spirits, a butter-lamp, offerings of grain and a censer of burning juniper leaves.

The majority of the tormas are arranged in five rows (dal) and together they comprise those figures of the spirit world who are the exclusive concern of the shaman. Although so many tormas are made they do not exhaust all the individual supernaturals, being merely a part standing for the whole. From each row the shaman 'takes out' a great variety of names, or a different selection on different occasions. The whole altar is overseen by the gods of the four directions, of which the most important is Narobön, the god of the north who was the teacher of the First Shaman, Meme Bengyap Ruta (8). The name Narobön would seem to link Tamang shamanism with a broad Himalayan tradition, also appearing as Naro bon chung, a Bon priest with whom Milarepa disputed for possession of Mount Kailāsa (Das, 1881). Nepalis of the Darjeeling area also tell of a pair of 'Nayādeutā' who resided in Tibet for 50 years under the names of

Narubon and Chaurubon (Macdonald, 1976b: 340).

Me-me Bengyap Ruta is a figure of considerable local fame who is credited with the discovery of the 'hidden land' (beyul) in the upper Langtang. It seems that the Me-me lived south of Kyirong near the (present-day) border. One day one of his oxen (lang; Tib. glang) escaped and made its way via Bridim up the Langtang valley with the Me-me in pursuit. It went as far as Lang^hisa (= place where the ox died) where unfortunately it expired; the red rock on which the Me-me dried its skin can still be seen there (see also Tilman, op. cit.).

The Me-me amongst others is represented in the rearmost of the five rows of the altar which is known as the rig-dsin dal, the rig-dsin being the early shamans, the Heroes or knowledgeable ones, who have mastered the magic arts completely having learnt them from the gods themselves. (9) The present-day shamans, or the majority of them (see Ch. 7), belong to the gytpe rig-dsin, or lineage of Heroes in the sense that they claim an unbroken transmission of knowledge stretching back to the Me-me himself. This row thus represents the ancestor shamans who are invited first to the ceremony to keep watch over the proceedings and aid the practitioner; they are given hospitality in the form of beer and incense but never blood. The second row from the back called the jo-mo dal comprises the female counterparts of the Heroes, the fairy-like women with whom the ancestors unite "in perfect enjoyment with women who are equally accomplished" as Das puts it (1976: 1179).

In the third row are the ma-bön, the army of the Bon, who are the shaman's familiars or helping spirits who assist in the removal of the gra^{he(n)} or enemy spirits. There are many of these powerful spirits, some being equated with the Gosāikund lakes, a site of particular sanctity for the shamans, another identified as a Newar spirit and so on. The next row is the guru dal whose most powerful member is Siva in the guise of Guru Tsendin Deva. Finally at the front is the lenghin dal whose members are described as being "like policemen", i.e. assistants who are charged with bringing the witches when the shaman summons them.

After the ceremony these tormas may be consumed by the sponsor, his family and friends in just the same way as Buddhist tormas. However to their right are set up another group representing the graha

enemy spirits. These are the lut-tor (Tib. glud-gtor) which are never consumed by the participants. They are the substitutes or 'scapegoats' as the term is sometimes translated which, at the culmination of the Kurim ceremony, are destroyed by the shaman at a crossroads outside the village boundary. The use of such substitutes is an important feature of Tamang exorcisms, whether shamanic or Buddhist, in which the substitute torma comes to represent a crystallization or embodiment of evil. Allen (op. cit.) explores the notion that they may be in some sense a prestation but it is clear that this is only true in so far as they are offered to entice the evil demons to enter them; from then onwards the demons have been trapped into the shaman's power and can be expelled into a 'beyond' where they can no longer affect human life.

I am inclined to see the substitute tormas as the structural parallel of the tormas ordinarily designed for the gods, but with the normal signs reversed. In the latter case, as was noted (Ch. 4), there is a three stage transformation - from offering to the gods, to embodiment of them to magical foodstuff. In the case of the substitutes they begin as offerings to the demons, become 'demon-traps' or embodiments of evil spirits and end not by being incorporated into the worshipper but by being excluded altogether from the village. Exorcism in some respects is a reversal of the normal process of worship.

At first sight the shamanic pantheon's organization appears rather similar to that of the Buddhist pantheon with its arrangement of gurus and their female counterparts, patron deities and guardians and indeed more or less conscious attempts may have been made to build on the same pattern. All the same, there are several significant differences to be noted. Firstly, the shaman's system is highly exclusive since the majority of supernaturals are only of concern to him with very little overlapping of Buddhist (or Hindu) deities. Stemming from its exclusivity is the second point, that the knowledge represented by the shaman's spirit world is largely esoteric; it is closed to the majority of the audience who, while they may understand the general plan and be familiar with a few of the deities, do not interact with them regularly. Whereas the Buddhist pantheon is opaque to the layman more as a matter of its technical complexity, the shaman's spirit world has much greater connotations of secrecy - the overall system is fully comprehensible

(and hence usable) only by those who have been initiated into the lineage of Heroes. For the audience its function is to impress rather than to instruct. In this way the shamanic tradition maintains its independence; not tied to the ways of tradition laid down in the texts, the shaman is able to adopt new elements into the pantheon and drop others to suit changing circumstances. It is not that he is an innovator in any radical sense (10) but that he is flexible and responsive to the needs of his community.

Having constructed the altar the shaman dons his traditional costume which he brings with him in his shamanizing basket. (The Syabru bombo, who does not wear the costume, is also not empowered to conduct this ceremony and so another shaman from the nearby village of Wangbi must be called). The costume and equipment shows many similarities with that used by Himalayan shamans belonging to other tribes, another indication that Himalayan shamanism is in some ways a pan-tribal phenomenon. It consists of a flared white skirt (mayül) worn with a long cummerbund wound round the waist, a sleeveless woollen jerkin and a head-dress (tüi) consisting of a circular band of material with streamers of coloured cloth wound round it and left trailing down the back. Over this outfit is placed a crossover string of small bells (shang-shang rol-mo) and strings of beads (rud-rächhe mäla); into the cummerbund is tucked an antelope horn (tsü ru), symbolic of swiftness. Finally he takes up his drum (nga), the most important part of his equipment. This has an overall length of about 70cms with a double-sided head with a diameter of about 35 cms. to which is attached a three-sided, elaborately carved handle shaped like a phurba or magic dagger and depicting various deities. Into the side-stringing are inserted feathers (symbols of flight) and sprigs of juniper. It weighs about 1½ kg. and apart from short breaks is beaten almost continuously throughout the performance with a curved bamboo stick which is gripped in the right hand while the drum is held upright in the left. These days the shamans rarely make their own drums, usually buying them from the neighbouring district of Yarsa for Rs. 50-70. Old drums however are more greatly prized.

It is of particular importance that the drumming should be continuous for this is how the shaman maintains his control over the spirits he battles against during the seance; should he need to use his hands for something else or appear to be flagging an assistant

will take over the drum and attempt to keep up the rhythm. A rather gruesome story is told of the demise of one bombo who undertook to rid the Nāgkund lake below Gosāikund of its serpent spirit; he entrusted the drum to his wife (bombo-sha) with strict instructions that no matter what happened she was to keep beating the drum while he entered the water to do battle with the serpent. However, at the climax of the struggle the shaman emerged from the waters of the lake with the serpent entwined around him; his wife was so terrified that she dropped the drum and ran, so breaking the shaman's power. Immediately he was overcome by the serpent (N - nāg) and the lake ran red with his blood. To this day it is said that descendants of that particular lineage of shamans fear to go near the lakes at Gosāikund.

Throughout his preparations the shaman smokes and drinks, but not to the point of intoxication - nor does he take any form of stimulant or drugs. Friends and neighbours of the sponsor meanwhile begin to gather in the house while their womenfolk cook and serve drinks and snacks.

The shaman begins an insistent drumming to raise the spirits. From now on he is the undisputed master of the evening, transformed from a quite ordinary man to a figure of special power controlling the unfolding events. Gradually the tempo of the drumming changes, the shaman begins to shake (bā-pa) and his strings of bells to jingle; his breath comes in hoarse gasps and whistles. The first contact with the spirit world has been made. Then, as in other rites, there is the lengthy invocation during which the shaman travels up and down the land seeking the gods and inviting them to come and take their places in the tormas.

Following an episode of fortune-telling there is a long period of devotional singing during which the shaman, accompanied by the audience, sings songs telling of the deeds of the ancestor shamans and recounting the acts of the gods (1). Then the audience is anointed with empowered water which has been sanctified by the blessing of the goddess Ganga Devi. After this a number of children and babies are presented to the shaman to receive protective charms in the form of wrist threads and pats of butter placed on the head. All the time incense of juniper is kept burning and on frequent occasions milk or liquor is sprinkled on the altar. Further offer-

ings are then made to the altar with the blood of a freshly slaughtered chicken which is scattered over the tormas, the entrails being placed among them.

Next comes the most exciting and dramatically effective event of the kurim ceremony: the killing of a witch (whose precise identity is not revealed). The shaman's assistant places a large flat stone covered with burning embers in the doorway of the house; on it is stood a torma representing the witch (sön-de). The shaman squats facing the doorway and drums furiously, first sending his 'spirit police' to fetch the witch. Then with a tremendously realistic pantomime of sounds and gestures the shaman entices the witch across the threshold and into her torma. At this precise instant the assistant, concealed in readiness behind the door crashes a burning stave down on the witch torma, annihilating the witch and scattering embers everywhere. Subsequently the remains are eagerly examined and when a single hair, singed through in the middle, is discovered this is regarded as proof that the witch did indeed die.

Then the shaman gives a further display of his personal powers to command the spirit world by incarnating a spirit in the body of a live chicken. This takes place outside the house in the courtyard where the hapless bird is suspended from a rod over a few hot embers. After half an hour of increasingly desperate drumming during which the chicken refuses to do anything more than gyrate slowly round the rod the shaman, unwilling to be seen to fail, calls for another chicken to be brought and within seconds this one flies up with a great squawking, signifying that it has been 'possessed'.

Several hours have now passed with breaks for refreshments being taken every hour or so. Attention now switches back to the sponsor of the ceremony who is seated with his wife in the centre of the floor. The shaman attaches a gourd by a thread to his foot and dances around the couple whilst drumming, drawing away evil into the gourd which is later disposed of. Meanwhile a pot of water has been heated to boiling and using a pine branch the shaman proceeds to splash it over himself and the sponsor who is naked from the waist up. Evidently this is some sort of further purification and it is claimed that the water never scalds; nevertheless mem-

bers of the audience who are also liberally soaked shrink away from the flying droplets.

Time is running out now for the shaman since the performance must end at dawn. A couple of pieces of pure theatre follow in which the shaman is briefly struck dumb and then makes a couple of eggs gyrate on the surface of the drum. This leads into the finale -- the expulsion of the substitute tormas of the gra or enemies. These are placed on a winnowing basket together with grain and eggs; a trail of flour is laid out from the altar to the doorway to lead the demons away, then two men carry out the basket of substitute tormas followed by the shaman who clutches in his mouth the head of the recently slaughtered chicken; he is followed by the remainder of the male members of the audience (the women remain in the house). Shrieking and yelling to frighten away the spirits and brandishing their weapons they proceed down the village to the first crossroads beyond the village boundaries where a fire is quickly lit and, as the sun's rays light up the valley, the tormas are hurled into the flames. The dogs are left to scavenge among the remains while everybody returns to the house.

The kurim is one of the centrepieces of Tamang ritual and this short description gives some idea of the way the shaman works. His performance goes well beyond that of bringing to bear practical techniques to alleviate the patient's condition, or of supplicating the gods in the hope that they will cooperate with him. He mediates directly between human experience and cosmic processes, using his visionary powers and his links with the ancestor shamans and their gods to establish his own control over threatening forces and conducting the patient out of disorder and anti-structure into a new integration of person and cosmos. In this process social dynamics are not neglected as the killing of the 'witch' and the withdrawal of evil from the patient and his wife testify. But it is his powers as magician (and showman) which predominate, especially the ability to translate the evil threatening the patient into a substitute object which is then destroyed (Tib. gtor-ma = broken up, scattered).

Buddhist exorcism

The patient also has the option of calling on a Buddhist lama to perform a ceremony which has certain underlying similarities with the shamanic exorcism. In fact, the lamas offer two main types of curing rituals -- one based on a reading of the sacred texts, often accompanied by the erection of a prayer flag or the consecration of an amulet, and the other on an exorcism. Although many people consult both specialists they would not have the same sort of ceremony performed twice. Instead, the lamas may give a reading and the shaman do the exorcism, or the shaman may conduct a divination in the course of which a Buddhist exorcism is recommended. It is not possible on the basis of a small sample to link particular patterns of consultation definitively with particular social groups, but there was the strong impression that the wealthier high-status members of the community tended to turn first to a lama exorcism while the poorer members employed a shaman.

A reading of the scriptures usually involves two lamas for a full day during which they read continuously from the volume called Do-mang (Tib. mdo-mang gzung bsdus) meaningly literally 'the many sutras', part of the Ka'-gyur canon. This contains a variety of magic spells, the reading of which serves to ward off misfortune, illness and the demons which cause them. The lamas read simultaneously, but from different sections (in order to complete the job more quickly), giving a rather curious impression of cacophany. But the point here is not that the sponsor (or anyone else) should actually understand -- or even hear -- what is being read. The reading 'works' in an impersonal fashion, being in the form of set formulas which have a creative controlling power in their own right, providing they are spoken by a specialist with the necessary authority to empower them. It is not the message which is important but the words themselves, a view which is reinforced by the fact that their benefits can also be transferred directly by contagion to the sponsor (or anyone else) if the volume containing them is touched to his head. This use of words is comparable to that of the soothsayer who repeats a mantric formula which in the normal sense is meaningless and is seen again in the widespread printing of prayer-flags (dar-chö) to ward off evil and danger. These are suspended outside the house on long poles or on the roof where the wind disseminates the the words to the four corners of the world. Other

examples of the magical use of words well-known from the Tibetan context are also popular with the Tamangs; these include the long 'mani-walls' and chö-ten (reliquaries) on the outskirts of villages and near gompas which are faced with stone tablets carved with sacred formulas such as 'om mani padme hum'; the large temple prayer wheels at the entrance to various gompas and the smaller versions turned by lamas and laity alike which contain printed prayers; and the use of rosary beads to count spoken prayers, the saying of which is one of the principal activities of the elderly. In all these cases the words are words of power that is derived metonymically from their association with the divine source from which they originate (cf. Tambiah, 1968).

Buddhist exorcisms may be either individual - concerned with driving out a specific demon or group of demons responsible for sickness, or communal - performed as a set calendrical ceremony for the protection of the whole community. Both types are variants on the well-known 'thread-cross' (do) ceremonies of Tibet (12). These, as Beyer notes (op.cit. 328-9), have three major symbolic elements; that of a canopy of threads as a demon-trap; the use of a substitute to cheat or divert the demons; and the representation of the cosmos in symbolic form.

Examples of both types may be briefly noted. The major occasion for the expulsion of demons on behalf of the whole community occurs on the full-moon day of the tenth month (the end of November) after a five day reading of all the temple's holy books, the Yum or perfection of wisdom texts. During the five days the lamas are fed and supplied with tea and beer by 12 sponsors (jinda) who are rotated from among the village households on an annual basis. They also provide the materials for the altar and the offerings. In addition to the regular altar tormas two others which figure in the exorcism itself are constructed. Zor is a pyramidal torma of kodo (millet) flour surrounded by wooden spikes and paper banners on which are drawn red flames. Into its front are impressed many 5-paise coins; grain is scattered all around the torma. Each person who visits the temple must pass a coin and a handful of maize around his head and upper torso to draw off evil and then place it before the torma.

The second torma is a fearsome representation of a Mamd female

demon. About three feet high the construction is based on a palanquin surmounted by a canopy of coloured crossed threads and surrounded by paper banners representing flames. The Mamö is equated in local thought with the famous black Bhairab of Kathmandu and is a fiendish figure made of earth, with a crown of skulls, gnashing teeth, staring eyes and long hair. The canopy is surmounted by another demonic face painted on paper, while the main figure is covered with a variety of offerings of strips of cloth, pieces of food, grain, etc. The base of the palanquin is in the form of a series of steps of earth called ri-rab representing Mount Sumeru, the legendary mountain which forms the world-axis. Surrounding the Mamö, who is periodically fed with offerings, are the tormas of the guardians of the four directions and a number of other little figures representing its 'family'.

The lamas make the usual offerings and invocations to entice the Mamö into its torma and complete the ceremony by setting off at dusk - the time when spirits are abroad - through the village, taking with them the Mamö and the Zor torma which is the repository of all the evil which must be expelled; they are accompanied by adult men with knives drawn who yell and brandish their weapons to scare away the demons. Two of the lamas are dressed in costumes and masks (shel-ba) representing the patron deity and the dākini of Guru Rinpoche, while a third is semi-naked, smeared with blue paint and wearing only a pair of shorts with three inflated condoms tied to the front - a comic representation of a dzoyā (yogi) or ascetic whose function is to terrorize the children and young women by acting as an alternately grotesque and ridiculous character; he also has a bag in which he collects, or extorts, money. Other lamas play the cymbals and the drum while the head lama goes in front ringing a hand-bell, scattering rice and blessing each household in the village. The women and children come out on to their courtyards with braziers of hot ashes and burning juniper and throw handfuls of maize at the torma figures (13).

For half an hour the village is in pandemonium with the crashing of the musical instruments, the pranks of the lama-jester and the shrieks of men, women and children - the former to scare the demons out, the latter because of the sudden attacks by the jester. Every house in the village is visited and a complete circumambulation of the village boundaries described, then the tormas are thrown down at a crossroads on a knoll outside the village and the celebrants

return to the gumpa for a lavish feast provided by the sponsors. The Mamö threadcross obviously has much in common with the substitute tormas (lut) of the shaman, acting in much the same way to trap evil and then expel it. The individual curative rite follows much the same pattern on a lesser scale (and without the masked dancers of course). In one case a senior lama performed it for his wife who had been ill for some time. The entire ritual spans two days and again requires the construction of elaborate thread-cross figures; the main one is Dana Gur-sum, his three heads representing a boar, a horse and a tiger. Above him is the canopy of threads and all around the paper flame banners; the base used this time is an iron frying pan. Three other principal tormas are made: Pungli with the head of a man, Kāli with the head of a horse, and Zor, the magic weapon tomasa.

The lengthy ceremony follows the familiar pattern of consecrating the offerings, inviting the deities who preside over the ritual, dedicating the offerings, conjuring the demons into their tormas with a mixture of offerings and coercion and instructing them to obey the commands of the priest and be satisfied with their offerings. At the conclusion the pan containing the tormas is carried away into the fields, preceded by men holding flaming brands. A fire is lit and the main tomasa set beside it. The officiating lama hurls the others into the flames and the participants then return to the courtyard of the house where the lama inverts the iron pot and places it under his foot. His wife, the patient, offers him a ceremonial scarf and the lama, still treading down the pan, places tsampa flour on his wife's cheeks and on those of all the others present. Then everyone takes a handful of flour and hurls it skywards, shouting 'lha gyel looooooh!' - 'the gods ^{have} triumph^{ed}!', so concluding the ceremony. Once again the tormas hurled into the fire have functioned as lut or substitutes which bear away the evil with them, leaving the patient healthy once again while the concluding blessings fortify her resistance against future attack (14).

Conclusion

A common idea underlies both shamanic and Buddhist exorcisms - the subject lacks something which he should have (his 'soul' or 'life power') and is plagued by something he shouldn't have (illness, demons). The treatment consists in removing the demons (having first identified

them through divination or trance) and renewing the life-force or recovering the soul. Essential to both is the function of the lut substitutes to bear away the evil. Also common to both is the notion of the person as participant in or locus of cosmic forces, and of the religious specialist as master of these forces. By virtue of the specific initiation and training he has undergone he is able to array these forces in the ritual space and to dominate them. The ritual materials, the threadcrosses and substitute tormas, are not for him and his clients just symbols of illness, confusion or disorder - they too participate in the cosmic process; to act upon them is to act upon the cosmos itself.

While the procedures of the shaman and the lama are essentially similar the specific nature of the cosmos with which each deals is different. The shaman is concerned with an immediate, locally grounded panoply of place-owners, guardians, ancestral shamans and familiars with whom he interacts in a highly personal manner. The bombo in the story who fought with the Gosāikund demon is the prototype of every shaman going in to do battle with evil at considerable personal risk, dependent on the support of his mentors and facing the possibility of catastrophic failure in every encounter. By contrast the Buddhist exorcism is a more distanced and formulaic procedure, lacking the personal and local overtones of the shamanic exorcism. It is to a large extent mechanical and can be performed by any empowered lama in the confident knowledge that correct ritual application is sufficient to bring the high Buddhist deities to the aid of the sufferer by recreating their original triumph over the demons. The alternative procedures can coexist because neither necessarily excludes the other or denies its validity. It may be reassuring to have the supreme Buddhist gods on one's side, but more emotionally satisfying to have the shaman do personal battle on one's behalf with the immediate cause of the affliction.

Notes to Chapter 5

(1) The Tamang theory of the person is in effect a greatly simplified version of the tantric Buddhist tradition which holds that the body is the outcome of the interplay of spiritual forces (see Govinda, 1977). Tamang lamas follow this theory to the extent of holding that within the body are found mystic groupings of wrathful and peaceful deities associated with the psychic centres of the body: thus from the heart centre emanate the 42 peaceful deities, from the brain centre the 58 wrathful deities, and from the throat centre the 10 knowledge holding deities (see Evans-Wentz, 1969: 217ff). In more developed systems of Tibetan yoga Evans-Wentz notes that the aggregate of a living human body is composed of twenty-seven parts:

"(1) the five elements (earth, fire, water, air, ether); (2) the five skandhas (body-aggregate, sensation-aggregate, feelings-aggregate, volition-aggregate, consciousness-aggregate); (3) the five airs (downward air, warmth-equalising air, the pervader, upward-moving air, life-holding air); (4) the five sense organs (nose, ears, eyes, tongue, skin); (5) the six faculties (sight, smell, hearing, tasting, perception, reasoning); and (6) the mentality. These twenty-seven parts constitute the impermanent personality. Behind them all stands the subconsciousness, the Knower, which, unlike the personality, is the principle capable of realizing Nirvāna." (ibid: 192n).

(2) Compare with the Hindu tradition where death pollution affects the lineage rather than the household, perhaps a further indication of the importance of the household as an organising principle in Tamang social life.

(3) Cf the shrin̄di of the Sherpas (von Fūrer-Haimendorf, 1964: 265).

(4) A similar conceptual vagueness in which informants have difficulty in distinguishing clearly between different causative agencies has been noted among the Thulung of eastern Nepal by Allen (1976), who suggests that in fact this is a typical feature of Nepalese societies. One reason for this, more basic than a mere cultural quirk, may stem precisely from the lack of any objective connection between the putative cause and the observable symptom. Since there is no real possibility in such a system of experimentation and confirmation or falsification of results, it is of little importance which cause and which treatment are selected; although their chances

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of medical success are random (people either recover or they do not), any or all are equally effective as meaning-creating devices. A second reason lies in the willing abdication by laymen of knowledge to the specialists; discovering the cause is his job which he performs by virtue of superior powers and special training and how he does it is of little interest to the ordinary person who, when questioned about such matters usually replies, "Ask a lama/shaman, they know about these things, we don't".

(5) The sang-dung is comparable to the mindung of the Sherpas (von Fftrrer-Haimendorf, 1964: 254ff) and his techniques not unlike those of the janne manche (N) of for example Brahman Chetri villages who is also accomplished in 'blowing' mantras (N - phuk garne) (Stone, 1976: 68).

(6) The various types of rosary are exhaustively described by Waddell (op cit: 207-11) and a divinatory technique using them is also detailed (ibid: 465-6).

(7) Lessing describes a lamaist ritual with the similar title of 'calling the soul' (Tib. bla-'gugs), notes its shamanistic overtones and the way in which the lamas have equated the shamanistic concept of the bla with the namshe (Lessing, 1951).

(8) Hfifer names him as Tüsür Bon (Hfifer, 1974: 173).

(9) In the Buddhist tradition the rig-'dsin are described as Knowledge-Holding Deities who appear after death (Govinda, op cit).

(10) Berreman (1964) stresses the innovative role of the Pahari shaman but in that case too it seems that the shaman is more concerned with re-arranging elements within a given cultural tradition, rather than with more radical or far-reaching changes.

(11) Hfifer (1974) has thunrap or kerap for these devotional songs while Peters (1978) gives sherap. I was told they were called le-ye. All these terms have the connotation of an ordered series of events stemming from early times. Evidently they must be distinguished i.a. from hvai - songs recounting the genealogy of the clans, dangbo dangbo tampe - 'myths', accounts of the origin of the cosmos etc., and māne - Buddhist devotional songs and prayers.

(12) See Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975: Ch XXVI and Beyer, op cit: 318-59.

Notes cont

(13) This is performed on the same day as the Mani-Rimdu festival of the Sherpas and is obviously related to the 'cham dances, if on a much smaller scale limited by the great cost of the costumes and the shortage of personnel to mount the full drama. See Waddell, op cit: Ch XX; von Führer-Haimendorf, 1964: 210ff; Jerstad, 1969.

(14) She did in fact recover shortly afterwards.

CHAPTER SIX

OFFERING RITUALS:

THE GIFT OF LIFE AND THE PREPARATION FOR DEATH

The various types of ritual examined so far have to a great extent been concerned with religion in the world - with its active, potent side as seen in the protective and exorcistic rites performed on behalf of individuals and the community. But, just as Beyer notes of the Tibetan lama that he "was more than merely a Buddhist shaman; he was also involved, ideally, in his own quest for enlightenment and the spiritual preparation for his own death" (op cit: 23), so one can say of the Tamang religious enterprise that it does attempt to look beyond the immediate concern of survival in a dangerous and potentially hostile world of lurking demons which must be kept at bay and fickle mountain gods which must be placated to the ultimate questions of personal salvation and after-death existence, and to man's place in the moral scheme of the universe.

In this chapter rituals - primarily centred on the Buddhist gumpa - which adopt an alternative approach to divinity will be considered. Largely discarding the coercive style of the exorcistic rituals these are cast in the form of prayers and offerings which seek to influence the gods. Rituals of this type tend to engage the concerns of the community as a whole and to mobilise the resources and efforts of many people for their successful accomplishment. They appear to have something in common in structure and style with the supplicatory rituals for the territorial gods but now the notion of supplication is embellished and extended to that of offering (che-pa) to the highest Buddhist gods in return for their life-conferring powers, their loving compassion and their assistance with personal salvation. I shall focus particularly on the monthly tse-chu ceremony and the bi-annual nyung-ne, directed at two of the supreme deities, Guru Rinpoche and Chenrezi respectively.

The monthly tse-chu

I begin by describing the monthly tse-chu ritual and then go on to examine how its themes are worked out, to unpack the various levels of meaning at which it can be seen to operate and to relate these to both local and doctrinal explications and to associated cosmological ideas. (1)

The ritual invariably takes place after dark on the tenth day of each month in the Tibetan calendar; it lasts until the early hours of the following morning. The first few hours are spent in preparation of the altar by the temple sacristan, the other officiating lamas and lay helpers. This involves preparing the offerings and the tormas: a large elaborately decorated one for Guru Rinpoche and two slightly smaller ones for Guru Dragpo as the vidam and Senge Dongma as the kandoma, plus a dozen or so additional tormas representing various lesser guardians of the doctrine, protectors and local godlings. These will be placed, as always, on a lower tier of the altar below the three principal deities (see overleaf). Six balls of dough representing the six sponsors of the ceremony are also placed around the base of the main torma. Flanking the main torma, or paltor, are placed jugs containing beer or spirits, and tea which respectively represent medicine or semen (men; Tib. sman) and blood (rakta; cf N ragat). These are known as the specific offerings. In addition there are the general offerings, divided into the outer offerings (Tib. phyi-mchod) consisting of bowls filled with water and grain (representing water for washing and for drinking, food and perfume) and lights, incense and flowers, and the inner offerings (Tib. nang-mchod) comprising mirror, bell, incense, cloth, a holy book and the shalse (Tib. zhal-zas) or food torma. Once the ritual has commenced the tso (Tib. tshogs) or offerings of the sponsors will be placed at the very base of the altar - jars of beer and liquor, numerous plain rice tormas, and winnowing trays filled with cooked breads of various types and eggs, grain, maize and flour. Other items which go to make up the completed altar include a dadar arrow and a water vase, a thunderbolt sceptre (dorje) and two smaller undecorated tormas, the gyek-tor and the lu-tor which are thrown out of the gompa to buy off the demons which might otherwise hinder the ceremony.

Before the ceremony begins the lamas are given a meal of rice with a curried sauce; throughout the performance they will also be kept supplied with tea and alcohol. Then, to the accompaniment of the big temple drum interspersed with the smaller hand drum, the cymbals and the horns, they begin the lengthy readings and chanting. At this stage the audience from the village is small and pays little attention to the proceedings which do not directly concern them. The service continues through a number of liturgical stages: the recitation of the formula of refuge and the confession of sins;

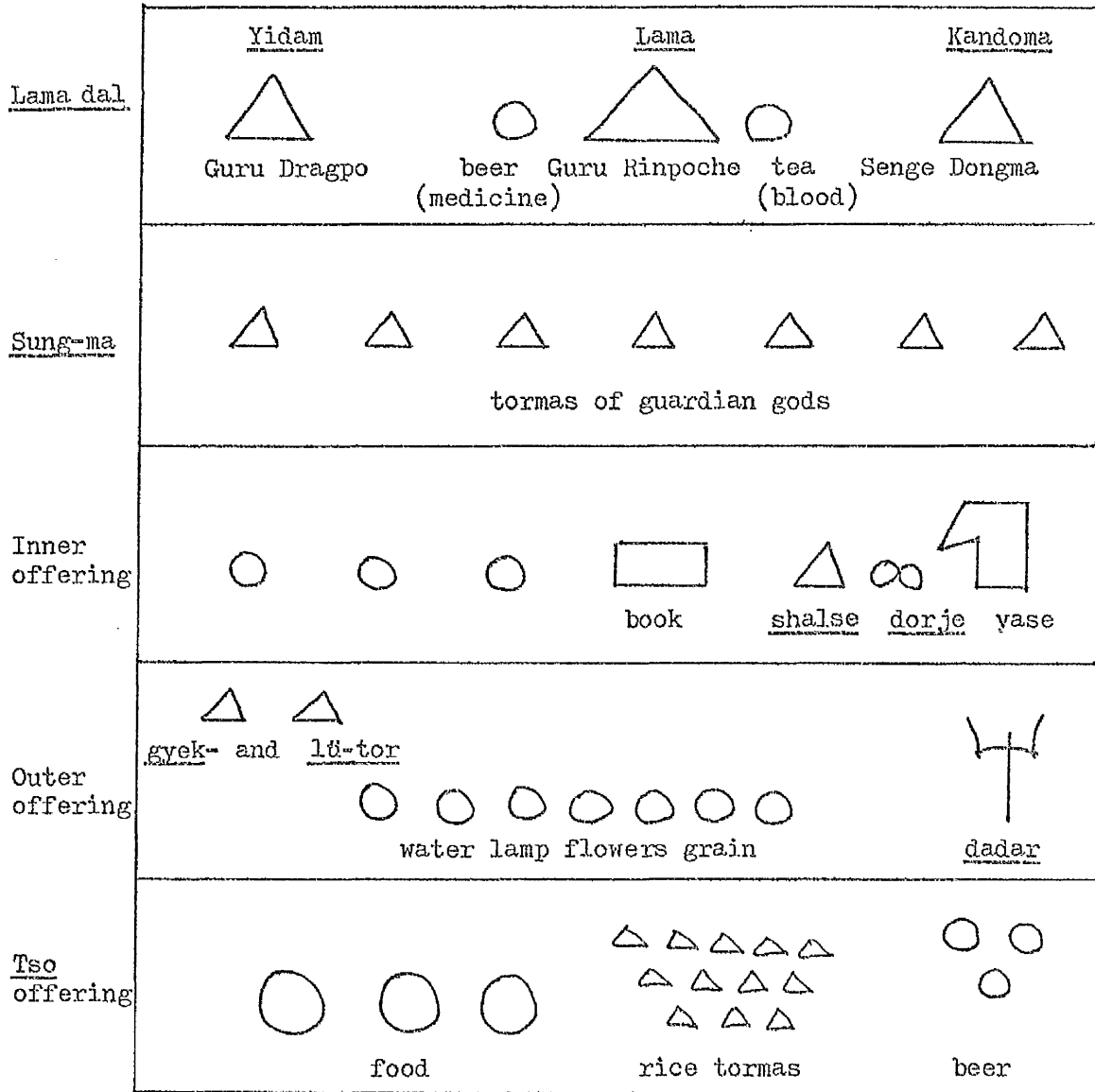


Fig 11 - Altar (in raised tiers) for tse-chu

the purification of the altar and the offerings; the invitation to the deities to attend the banquet which has been prepared for them; consecrating the offerings, offering them and singing the praises of the gods; and recognising the benefits to be derived from them, namely; the unity of existence and the perfection of the four-fold activity - pacifying, gaining prosperity, empowerment and destroying.

Now the six sponsors of the ritual make their entrance together with most of the other inhabitants of the village, bringing with them the tso offerings and baskets of cooked rice, spiced potatoes, soup and more beer. The sponsors remain in the centre aisle of the gomba making their obeisances to the altar (the triple prostration) and being introduced as the givers of the magnificent feast while the other men take their positions seated to the right facing the altar and the women to the left. The tso offerings are made, there is a final prayer to the gods and then they are requested to take their leave with apologies to them for any faults they may have found in the ritual performance. Then the tso offerings and the other food which has been brought is distributed to everybody present; some of the tso is also kept back for those who did not attend. The young people frequently end the evening by singing and dancing on the verandah of the gomba for several hours.

Offerings and the attainment of life

For the participants the communal consumption of the tso food provides the central raison d'être of the ritual. How is the significance of this regular monthly event to be interpreted?

The tso offerings return to the celebrants at the conclusion of the ritual as tse-tup, or life attainment; it is now magically empowered food which has been imbued with special qualities as a result of its proximity to the divine forces which have occupied the altar. Clearly the presentation of the offerings at the outset of the ceremony is closely associated with the benefit which the celebrants expect to receive; participation in or transformation by the qualities of the divinity.

One line of approach is to compare this activity with the apparently similar character of Hindu pujā in which the deity, in a setting

of ritual purity, receives gifts, primarily food, as a form of inducement or payment for favours received or to come. But this prestation threatens the equilibrium of the gift relationship, in which it is always the gift-giver who is adjudged the superior, by seemingly creating an obligation on the part of the superior deity to respond. However, the worshippers humble themselves before the deity by eating what in normal circumstances would be considered the inferior leftovers of the food of which he has partaken as prasād (N). The acceptance of this jutho (N) (polluted) food by the congregation re-establishes the hierarchical distance between men and gods and at the same time re-affirms the unity of the group, normally themselves hierarchically divided, as one pole in opposition to divinity (Babb, 1970).

There are some striking similarities with the present case. Firstly, the offering ritual always takes place in an atmosphere of ritual purity in which officiants, audience and offerings must all be cleansed and purified by the recitation of mantras. And secondly, the offerings once made to the gods return to the congregation in a transformed state and all must eat together. A final point is that the term tse-tup is always translated into Nepali as prasād.

However, here the social context is different and lacks the extreme stress on degrees of hierarchy and commensality and the polluting qualities of food which characterise Hindu society, and the tse-tup is not generally thought of as leftover food. It does, however, have another quality which it shares with prasād, that of being a sacred substance; what began as ordinary mundane food ends by being transubstantiated into divine nectar whereby men are able to partake of the qualities of divinity thus prolonging life, granting wishes and maintaining luck and protection, analogous to the transformation of wine and wafer in the Christian Mass. A refusal to eat is seen not only as a repudiation of the deity but as a senselessly wasted opportunity to imbibe the divine power (it is inconceivable that these items would be "fed to the village dogs," as one account has it). The role of the tse-tup may be highlighted by comparison with genuine leftovers in other rituals, notably in the foodstuffs which are offered to the spirit of a dead person in the seven week period following death and which are invariably thrown away afterwards, or in the zor tormas associated with the thread-cross rituals which although impregnated with divine power are similarly disposed of, or in substitute offerings and offerings to the demons

which are regarded as polluting and are only handled by religious specialists. Food offerings thus have a variety of different meanings in different ritual contexts with a primary contrast between leftovers impregnated with malign power which are disposed of and divinely transformed offerings which are consumed. Thus eating in the setting of the tse-chu is the means whereby men are able to partake of the qualities of their gods. The ritual, far from emphasising opposite poles in a hierarchy, is a way of overcoming the hierarchical distance which normally separates men and gods and of bringing about a temporary union with divinity. It may be noted that the tso offerings have a slightly different quality from the altar tormas themselves. The altar tormas are there primarily for the benefit of the gods, to provide them with a temporary location during the service, and are only eaten when the gods have finished with them, a certain residue of power remaining from their presence. But the tso are explicitly there as a banquet in which all may participate, men and gods, coming together in commensal relations. (2)

Although, then, the offering ceremony preserves something of the structure of Hindu pujā, the tse-tup or life attainment is given a different meaning. But this does not mean that an imbalance is introduced into the pattern of reciprocity which is established for the significance of the gifts has been reversed: instead of magnificent gifts being given by inferior worshippers who receive an inferior return of jutho food, in the Buddhist case the gifts which open the encounter are nothing more than grain and water and other mundane materials (although inflated by the liturgy to greater munificence - see below), whereas the return is holy life-conferring power. The ultimate superiority of the deity is maintained.

There remains the paradox of why supernatural beings whose position is supposedly won precisely through their achievement of a totally desireless state should be interested in the offerings at all. The answer to this, at any rate from the village point of view, would seem to be that the gods regularly approached in this way, particularly Guru Rinpoche and Chenrezi, are the active reflexes of the wholly passive Buddha Opame, the one taking human form and the other divine (as a bodhisattva) but neither having acquiesced in the final liberation and severance of mundane ties; they are thus still open to basically human modes of interaction. Moreover their normal dwelling place is thought to be one of the heavens where they are surrounded

by an abundance of everything. And the altar offerings are inflated by the ritual texts in a tremendous hyperbole to the most extravagant proportions; in the case of the 'rice mandala' used in a number of rituals it is said to represent the offering of the whole world. The intention evidently is to attract the gods away from the pleasures that they can enjoy in heaven so that they will take notice of and come to the assistance of men. To put it in a more sociological way one could say that the lamas use the gifts as negotiable strategy (Parkin, 1976) to inveigle the gods into attending the ceremony in order that the request for the more valuable counter-prestation can be made. The gift is not just a form of altruism which merely invites reciprocity by masquerading as a 'pure gift', for here it is used to establish a coercive power of its own, obliging a response from the recipient. Such strategies are a frequent feature of village social interaction where small gifts of food and drink often presage a request or are made but allowed to lie fallow in case the time should come when a favour is needed. In such circumstances the recipient will find it extremely difficult not to respond to what is clearly understood by both sides as a form of pressure - not only does he risk slighting the giver but he finds himself in the uncomfortable position of, through no fault of his own, being indebted. Such a technique, if used too frequently or unsubtly, runs the risk of being counter-productive since it may provoke the recipient to rage and a refusal to accept - but once having accepted he is totally committed to a response.

Ortner (op. cit.: Ch 6) has also explored the strategy of the offering ceremony as performed by the Sherpas and indeed elevates the coercive power of the offerings into the central feature of her account. But according to her interpretation the sequence of offerings which are presented is designed to make the gods more socially engaged and concerned through a pollution of their original purity by successively supplying them with bodily form (with the specific offerings), the perceptions (the inner offerings) and the senses (the outer offerings). To arrive at this she performs what she terms an "analytic inversion" (ibid: 147) of the actual order of the ceremony which in fact begins with the general (the outer offerings) and then moves through the inner offerings to the specific (the medicine and blood). This procedure risks inverting the meaning as well for as has been noted the ritual in fact places great stress on the purity of the officiants, the setting and the offerings before any approach to the gods can be made.

Although one of the objectives of the ritual is indeed to engage and focus the attention of the gods, this is achieved through the general coercive strategy of the gift relationship (which is a component of all Tamang rituals) and not through the particular symbolism of the offerings themselves which, as I shall suggest below, admit of a quite different interpretation. To suppose that the meanings of the ritual symbols - especially when they have been 'inverted' to suit the analyst's framework - can be reduced to a single intention in this way is to elevate the idiosyncratic views of a few performers to an explanatory status and to ignore a thousand years of Buddhist doctrine and practice which has chosen its symbolic forms with an eye to accomplishing rather more than the humbling of its gods.

A final point to note here is that the ritual at this level of interpretation engenders a certain social unity and takes place in the context of fulfilling social obligations. Although much stress is sometimes placed on Buddhism as individualistic in its orientation and largely a-social, this is to make a not entirely accurate substitution of theory for practice. Acknowledging one's obligations to the whole community is an important aspect of the tse-chu, manifested in the system of sponsorship which brings together groups of six neighbours every month in strict rotation through the village who supply all the material necessities of the ritual. The monetary value of each household's contribution is about Rs 100. It consists of about 4 kg of flour, a similar amount of potatoes, 8 kg of rice, plus meat, chillies, butter, tea and alcohol. The jinda (Tib. sbyin-bdag) or sponsors cooperate in the preparation and presentation of the tso offerings and the communal meal which is served at the end of the ceremony. By observing these obligations they become the instruments of religious benefit to everyone. Although by no means the whole community attends the feast it is held that every household should send a representative. This too does not always happen but the following morning a portion of the torma and beer which has been set aside is distributed to every household, so that the full community is temporarily united as a congregation, whatever may be its normal divisions. Religious observance thus takes place in a form which, as one writer puts it, "provides people with an opportunity to reaffirm and strengthen the social ties which exist between them" (Bunnag, 1973: 178).

Ritual structure and process

I have identified the core theme of the tse-chu as the overcoming of the hierarchical division between men and gods in order to bring about a union between man and divinity which in village terms is conceived of as human access to divine power and protection. The favoured strategy for gaining such access is through prestations and counter-prestations of food. What I want to do at this stage is to look more closely at the particular dramatic or processual form which the ritual takes and at the juxtaposition of the ritual symbols which not only flesh out the core theme, making it seem concrete, real, compelling to the participants, but which allow the performance to function on a variety of meaning levels.

First let me define what I mean by 'meaning levels'. The concept of 'the union between man and the divine' is theologically precise and is also as a matter of fact the result which the village participants carry away with them from the ceremony - whatever the terms in which they may actually express that result. But it is a very vague and abstract idea which appears to lack content; it would be rather difficult to say precisely what it meant and it can readily be accepted that it might mean different things to different people. The purpose of the ritual, as I see it, is not only to bring about the result which is predicated in its core theme - ie to 'work' at an instrumental level - but to fill out that core theme with content so that it seems not only believable but feasible and above all worthwhile to the performers. To do this successfully, particularly in the case of a religion like Buddhism which spans many centuries and a number of diverse societies, its symbolic structure must not be overdetermined with respect to particular local meanings; in other words it must speak to men of diverse temperaments in different societies at different historical periods and yet still convey the power of its central idea. To see how it accomplishes this we may employ the notion of a thematic pattern which grows out of the core theme and which serves to formulate the preconditions of religious activity, setting up the basic similarities and contrasts out of which meaning is constructed. The thematic pattern employs concepts which, as Babb puts it, "are not, in the most literal sense, the 'meaning' of ritual; they are, rather, the meanings that make meaning possible" (Babb, 1975: 28). They are not, however, comparable to a ritual 'grammar' which expresses a purely formal structure within which communication may take place and which is unconscious as far as the performers are concerned. Rituals may be 'polysemic' but they

are not open to any interpretation at all.

The thematic pattern may be more accurately compared with the linguists' notion of 'semantic fields' - that is, groups of lexical entries which share certain semantic components or markers in common, their meaning thus being specified by relations of similarity and difference among the semantic components (Bierwisch, 1970). Whether one chooses to call the ritual equivalent of semantic fields thematic patterns, symbolic grids (Sahlins), symbolic structures (Yalman) or planes of classification (Turner) is not crucial. What is important is to recognise that these parameters run all through religious life, guiding and directing particular rituals and crosscutting a variety of rituals so that the meaning of any one example derives additional resonances from its relationship to other rituals in the total ritual field.

The thematic pattern also tends to be built up from ideas which like the core theme are still of considerable generality - for example, the linked ideas of health, luck, fertility and life contrasted with their linked opposites of illness, misfortune, barrenness and death. The specific patterning of the themes is likely to be variable from one culture to another and this I suggest is the reason why to an insular participant who finds his own rituals moving and meaningful those of another culture are likely to appear bizarre and incredible: their pattern speaks to nothing comparable in his own experience, nor do the symbols through which the pattern is expressed. Given the generality of the components of the thematic pattern the critical intention should not be to reduce each ritual to a trite opposition of terms or see it in terms of a sweeping generalisation in which all religions are ultimately about the same things - a Hindu and a Muslim would be unlikely to agree! - but rather to demonstrate the pattern in each case and show how it is brought to life by religious symbols.

The thematic pattern, then, acts to select the symbols which in terms of that culture will most effectively express the meanings of the ritual and it also ensures that, as it were, everybody who participates is pulling in the same direction. What it cannot do (and for its success must not) is determine precisely what interpretation will be given to the component symbols by all participants at all times; there will be esoteric and exoteric interpretations, sectarian interpretations and doctrinally sophisticated or naive interpretations.

At every level of society there will be differences in individual capacity for understanding just as there are individual differences in piety and commitment.

These then are the meaning levels at which the ritual can be said to operate. Their number is limited by the thematic pattern (barring aberrant cases) and at each level they can be seen as moving the participant in the direction of the resolution of the core theme of the ritual. My point is that these are already given within the ritual structure itself, which encompasses all acceptable meanings; they are not externalized in village and town, or in specialists and laymen, or in great and little traditions or sophisticate and popular levels although naturally one may expect certain correspondences to occur between particular social groups and particular interpretations. The thematic pattern acts to set up the basic relations of similarity and contrast in terms of which the ritual proceeds and is sufficiently undetermined to permit a number of interpretations. What then is the quality of the ritual which decides what particular meanings are generated in terms of the core theme? To uncover this involves an examination of the way in which ritual symbols are juxtaposed and then retotalized or reconstituted at another level of meaning, so that elements which are already symbolically constituted at one level become signs for a symbolic relationship at another level.

What I mean by this can be clarified by examining the colour symbolism of the tse-chu, particularly the use of red and white. Red and white are perceptually contrasted colours, although not opposed in the way that white and black are opposed as the presence or absence of light. They are also naturally occurring colours which are sometimes found in close conjunction - for example, white and red rhododendrons, white snow and red rock, white semen and pus and red blood, white rice and red meat. That they are seen as contrasted but linked in Tamang thought is indicated by for example the concept of a proper meal containing both rice and meat or the understanding of procreation as resulting from the fusion of the father's semen and the mother's menstrual blood or the concept of marriage as the joining of the lineage of the (white) bone with the lineage of the (red) flesh. In social thought the idea of the fusion of these two qualities is already strongly present, and especially associated with sexual union. That sexual symbolism plays a significant part in the ritual under consideration is clear from the presence on the altar of the offerings of

milky-white beer said to be semen or medicine and reddish-brown tea said to represent blood. The union of male and female in procreation of a new being evoked by these items is echoed in the male and female polarities of the deities on the highest tier of the altar - Guru Dragpo and Senge Dongma - and this association points the way from the particularities of sexual polarity and fusion to universal polarity and union (cf Lama Govinda, 1977 (1960): 103).

This as I have suggested is an important aspect of the core theme but there is another which is also symbolized in the white and red specific offerings - that of transformation, ie. the transformation of men through participation in divinity and here the offerings are signs standing for a different set of relationships. We have seen from other contexts that white is also the colour of purity and by association of clarity; it is associated with holy milk-lakes, with butter-offerings, with libations of white beer to the gods, with the white rice tormas, with clear water and the reflective clarity of mirrors. Red is associated with meat-eating - with flesh and blood - and by extension with anger and killing, with offerings to the fierce destroying protector gods; red is the colour of pollution. Semen, although white, in this context shares a polluting quality with blood for sexual congress is itself a polluting activity. Moreover it gives birth to a self which is polluted by the karmic obscurations and delusions of the mundane world which conceal the clear light of true enlightenment. The ritual brings about the transformation of the polluting qualities of semen and blood by transmuting them into the nectar of wisdom and the blood of knowledge, the two qualities necessary for enlightenment - at an esoteric level of interpretation - or into divinely empowered food and drink - at a more exoteric level. The transformation and empowerment of the specific offerings is made clear in the liturgy:

"HUM! The stream of nectar from the union
of the Fathers and Mothers of the five families
in the skull bowl of this realm of the manifest,
this swirling nectar of the five families
possessed of the five knowledges:
grant us now the magical attainments of body, speech and mind!"

"HUM! This blood which transforms
the five poisons into the five knowledges,
this blood of great passion, passionless, free of passion,

this secret great blood, nondual, free of clinging;
this we offer up to the all-beneficent guru
and his hosts of peaceful and fierce deities." (Beyer, op cit; 167)

The ritual thus achieves an alchemical transformation of the most polluting of substances into the most pure and precious which at one level of understanding may be tse-tup - life attainment - while at another level it commutes the five poisons of existence - delusion, anger, selfishness, lust and envy - which obscure truth into the five wisdoms of enlightenment associated with the five Buddha-families.

There is yet a third set of symbolic relationships constituted out of the white and red, male and female polarities of the ritual. White is associated with passivity, with benevolence, with clarity of understanding; it is the colour of the peaceful deities. Red is the colour of the wrathful protectors, blood-drinking and demon-destroying; by extension it is the colour of vigour, potency and activity. These two qualities also represent the active and passive aspects of enlightenment. The active male principle is associated with compassion (nyingji), the quality of the bodhisattva Chenrezi who dwells in the red Deva-chen heaven; this represents the way or the 'means' towards enlightenment. The passive female principle is associated with wisdom (sherab) and it is only through the fusion of both these sets of qualities that enlightenment can be achieved. This may be conceived at one level of understanding as a need not only for meditation and contemplation of the supreme but unengaged Buddha Opame but for the active intervention of the love and mercy of Chenrezi (as will be seen more clearly in discussing the nyung-ne ritual). At the level of the esoteric tradition of an accomplished yogic practitioner the whole process may be conceived not as an external one of worshipping gods but a question of uniting forces within the adept's own body to produce enlightenment.

Thus important aspects of the thematic pattern of the ritual are concerned with contrasts and polarities, with the transformation and overcoming of duality, leading towards union. What are ostensibly the 'same' symbols are reconstituted by the ritual to express these different stages in the process, a power they possess by virtue of their different associations when juxtaposed in different contexts. At different levels of interpretation the thematic pattern may be conceived of as leading to the imbibing of divinely empowered food or of leading the worshipper towards enlightenment; neither interpretation is more

'correct' than the other. Nor is it significant that not all these meanings could be articulated by any one village worshipper or a group of them. Doctrine has been satisfied by the working out of the core theme and the ritual has worked in an instrumental sense in so far as the worshipper has been changed by the performance; he has been led through the series of steps logically embodied in the thematic pattern and symbolic structure of the ritual to a fresh integration of self and cosmos. He has been changed by the ritual in the direction prescribed by the doctrine; how he personally conceives of that change is from this perspective a secondary matter.

The idea of change in the participants suggests movement and development in the progress of the ritual - the series of symbolic meanings are not just presented as static tableaux. There remains another aspect of the thematic pattern - the overcoming of the hierarchical distance between men and gods in order to bring about union and transformation - which may best be examined through the processual form of the ritual, through its dramatic development.

The liturgical text used is the Konchok Chi-du (Tib. dkon-mchog spyi-'dus tshe-dbang mtshams-sbyur), or The Union of Precious Ones. The Precious Ones referred to are the traditional three jewels of the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Community (Buddha, Dharma, and Sangha) who are invoked at the start of most rituals in the well-known 'formula of refuge':

We go for refuge to the Buddha
We go for refuge to the Doctrine
We go for refuge to the Community.

In an expanded version it is also said:

"We beg you to purify our sins and pollutions of the body (...)
We beg you to purify the sins and pollutions of our speech (...)
We beg you to purify the pollutions and sins of our mind (...)
We pray you to give us the gifts of the True Body, Speech and Mind."

(Waddell, 1974: 442)

From the outset of the ritual a set of homologies is thus created between the Buddha, the Doctrine and the Community and between Mind, Speech and Body; the latter triad correspond to the three attributes necessary to achieve enlightenment which indeed are inseparable from it and which among all the classes of beings are possessed only by human beings. This is by no means pure abstraction, for the three

are concretely represented in the ritual forum by the yantras, mantras and mudras, or visual symbols of the altar, audible symbols of the recitation and music, and tactile symbols of the hand movements and ritual gestures. As the dynamic forces of the cosmos are no different from those of the ritual setting or even those of the practitioner himself, the correct application and coordination of body, speech and mind through ritual and with the proper attitude of devotion place these cosmic forces at the disposal of the practitioner. (Govinda, op.cit.: 92-3).

The ritual performance has commenced with the preliminary purification of the officiating lamas, the offerings and the congregation and then moves to the formula of refuge cited above which links the ritual setting with the forces of the cosmos. Then comes the invitation to the various deities to attend the ceremony. According to the texts they are brought to the altar by a complex process of visualization and then arrayed on the altar in their appropriate forms, before the offerings are presented (which hence cannot be regarded as fulfilling the purpose of giving the gods bodily form - see above). Whether or not the practitioner actually has the capabilities to succeed in this visualization is a different matter but the text details the necessary steps.

This emphasises a crucial point, that the deities participate in the ritual only to the extent that the lamas interact with them to give them form; it is the lamas who are in control rather than the gods, for they both bring them at the beginning and send them away again at the end. This of course accords with the esoteric view that they are in any case nothing but the emanations of the officiant's mind although for the village congregation it does seem that the gods have an independent existence. As one lama put it to me, it was like looking in a mirror: the reflection is there only so long as the subject remains, when one goes so does the other (3). Treating them for the moment as real entities it is clearly the lamas who are the mediators between men and gods. Lamas, as their title implies, are 'superior men' who through the practice of retreat and meditation have gained controlling powers over the gods; it is ultimately they who are responsible for the transformation of the offerings into the tse-tup. Because they are the locus of the divine union the layman has no direct access to the gods except through intermediaries and indeed laymen can benefit even if they do not attend the ceremony at all. This goes part of the way towards explaining the great regard in which the lamas are generally held as religious specialists.

With the gods now arrayed on the altar a second set of homologies is developed between the Precious Ones and the Three Emanation Bodies (Tib. sku-gsum), namely the Buddha Opame as primordial buddha and 'body of the absolute' (Skt dharmā-kāya) beyond forms and qualities, beyond saṃsāra and nirvāna; Chenrezi as the 'body of bliss' or perfect endowment (Skt sambhoga-kāya), the active embodiment of buddhahood and the helping bodhisattva; and Guru Rinpoche as the body of incarnation (Skt nirmāṇa-kāya) in the saṃsāric or mundane world. In this ritual it is three other deities which have been arrayed on the model of the Three Bodies with Guru Rinpoche now occupying the position in the centre as the primordial buddha, the summation of Guru Dragpo representing the active aspect and Senge Dongma the passive aspect of enlightenment.

The lamas then make the general offerings to the gods of the flowers, perfume, food and so on (or the water and grain standing for these offerings) and pray them to remain for the ceremony:

"Out of love for us and for all beings
with the strength of a magic manifestation,
remain here, Blessed Ones, we pray you
for as long as we make offering." (Beyer, op. cit.: 150)

The ritual's first task has been to overcome the normal gulf between men and gods; gods are usually above, ensconced in the pleasures of heaven, while men are below, mired in the sufferings of existence. The gumpa and especially the altar provide a meeting place as it were halfway between these normally separate spheres in which gods and men can interact. Or, at another level, the ritual space creates a simulacrum of the cosmos itself in which cosmic forces can be arrayed. The purificatory procedures and devotional attitudes consecrate the ritual space and raise it to a semi-divine status, while the gods must be lured away from heaven by pleas for their love and compassion and then kept happy during the performance with the sort of pleasures they are accustomed to while they listen to human blandishments. But although the altar attempts to transcend this gulf it still preserves in its form features of the hierarchy which permeates the whole pantheon, for it is the high gods who are summoned first and placed at the top of the altar, then the protector gods and the local godlings who are still not free of the wheel of existence, then the lamas as 'superior men', and finally ordinary worshippers who are seated right at the bottom.

As the ritual proceeds towards the specific offerings of medicine and blood, the union and transformation of male/female polarities, a third set of homologies is now established by the officiant lama who identifies himself with Guru Rinpoche situated in the central altar toma and standing for the primordial buddha in order to participate in his divine power; he identifies the Doctrine with the Guru Drago or yidam figure, both equivalent to the active principle of enlightenment, and the Community or here the congregation with the Senge Dongma or kandoma figure, representing the passive wisdom aspect of enlightenment. Having created these various triadic sets of identities it now becomes clear how the sexual and other symbolism explored above can be said to change the participants in the course of the ritual. They through their attitude of devotion (mind), the formula of refuge (speech) and the triple prostrations (body) are identified with the Precious Ones and the Precious Ones have been identified with the deities on the altar. With the direction of flow now reversed by the officiant to identify the altar deities with himself and the congregation, the union and transformation of the deities is the same thing as the union of the congregation with the doctrine and the ensuing transformation by the divine power that results.

Underlying these overt homologies there has been a further set of parallels between the ritual and the ultimate reality, between the performance and the realization, between the body and the cosmos and between matter and spirit. The ritual through its symbolic juxtapositions and its transforming identities has brought about the fusion of worshippers and cosmos by bringing them together and transcending the divisions between them to create a new integration. It has been powerful and impressive because its dramatic form and symbolic structure flow so logically from its underlying conception. The core theme of the oneness underlying the apparent diversity of phenomena and the necessity to rediscover this oneness by uniting the human with the divine already suggests the processual form the ritual must take and the appropriate patterning of its symbolic elements if the idea is to be made concrete and real to the participants. In focussing on the sexual symbolism of union and self-transcendence the ritual offers a mimetic representation of the birth of enlightenment itself and so helps to bring about what it represents. It matters not at all that the yogic adept might conceive this as an internal process within his own body, or that an ordinary village worshipper might see

it as a means to gaining the assistance of his gods. Each view preserves the essence of the core theme and the different meanings generated by the ritual are all isomorphic, so that the doctrinally 'correct' perspective is maintained while for example organising village motivations of pleasing the gods and receiving their blessings in a way which is congruent with and indeed orients them towards the more subtle goal of liberation.

The cosmological background

The description and explication of the tse-chu ritual introduces a number of concepts which form the background to a whole range of Buddhist rituals and permeate the whole religious enterprise. The account of the ritual interpretations alerts us to the fact that these concepts will not always be understood in the same way by village performers and those skilled in the doctrine, but this does not necessarily mean that there is any major contradiction in the views which are held. As with the ritual so too the doctrine can embrace variant interpretations provided these do not run counter to its principal tenets. The concepts of particular salience here are karma and rebirth, merit and divine assistance, and wisdom and compassion.

As is well-known, Buddhist doctrine defines existence as characterised by suffering; all pleasures are merely transitory for in the end they must be relinquished so leading to pain and loss. The most vivid illustration of this truth is old age and death when all previous joy will be nullified. Death however does not bring about a cessation of suffering for some part of the individual survives - his consciousness principle or 'soul' (namshe or sem) - to be reborn again either in the human world or another which may be even worse. This recycling of the consciousness is propelled by the moral law of karma which selects the future destination of the soul in accordance with the balance of sins and merit accruing from actions in the just-ended lifetime of the individual. Theoretically karma is self-propelling and fully explanatory in terms of the individual's present circumstances; they are the result of actions performed in a previous lifetime.

Tamang attitudes preserve the core of this doctrine although not necessarily its more austere implications. The community, although by no means renouncing the secular and sensual pleasures which come its way, generally accept the proposition that life is suffering. Indeed they reiterate constantly that the general pattern of hard work, poor food and clothing, sickness and often early death are dukkha (N) or

dungal (Tib. sdug-bsngal), that this is the result of past sins and that the prime aspiration is to escape the wheel of existence through meritorious action. Their belief that the immediate cause of much suffering is the activity of predatory demons and that this can be mitigated by worshipping gods is not necessarily inconsistent with the doctrine of karma. After all, if it were not for karma one would have been born with sufficient stocks of lung-ta or life force to resist the attacks of demons; conversely, while worshipping the gods in part to increase one's stock of lung-ta one is also performing meritorious actions which will have a beneficial effect on one's karma. Gods and demons intervene in the karmic process but they do not destroy its rationale. What is theologically more doubtful (although not unknown in other societies - see Sharma, 1973) is an interpretation of karma which holds that its effects can be transferred to others and conversely that the actions of another can influence someone else's karma. In particular there is the view that the bad karma of black shamans and witches can be transferred to children while the meritorious actions of the bereaved can be of assistance to a dead person's soul. People are not generally concerned to rationalise these attitudes; it is just that karma provides a convenient explanatory principle for both the general condition of suffering and the means towards release, and for specific cases where it fulfils a cognitive need to account for misfortune or intervene on behalf of a loved one.

The supreme goal of Buddhist action is to break the bonds of karma altogether and escape from the cycle of existence and rebirth. This enlightenment is achieved, according to Tibetan doctrine, through the fundamental realisation that all perceptions, sensations, thoughts and actions - all karmic activity, good or bad - obscures the true reality which is that the void, absolute emptiness, clear light underlies everything, and is the truly cosmic state. Karma imposes a barrier between man and this cosmic state which is utterly without qualities by deluding him that the phenomena which his faculties present to him have the character of authentic experience, whereas in fact they are an obscuration or pollution of the absolute purity of the void. Liberation comes about through stilling this shadow-show and regaining the state of qualitylessness and clear light which it has hidden. No duality is posited between cosmic reality and karmic appearances, for without emptiness there could be no appearances; the mind can only impose qualities on the cosmos if its underlying condition is one of qualitylessness. It is through grasping the essential oneness of the cosmos that the Great Liberation is brought about.

This is not a view which would be articulated by village specialists or their congregation, and their motivations - while still congruent with the doctrinally prescribed goal - are expressed in different terms. Both laity and priesthood see existence in the more limited - but still theologically correct - terms depicted in the well-known 'wheel of life' paintings found in many temple frescoes and banners. Karma is seen as the strictly mathematical accumulation of good deeds and bad, merit and demerit, which after death are weighed up by Shinje Chö-ki Gyelbo, King of the Dead, who has recorded them all in his book and weighs white stones for the good deeds against black stones for the sins. Reward or punishment depends on the outcome of this judgement and will direct the departing consciousness either to one of the hells (nyelwa; Tib. nyal-ba) or heavens (shingum; Tib. shing-khams). In village thought the hells are equated with the six regions of rebirth into which the wheel of existence is divided, namely: the abode of the minor gods (lha) who are constantly at war with the inhabitants of the second region, the lha-ma yin or 'almost gods'; then comes the human world (mi-ne) which is characterised by suffering in the form of birth, sickness and death, then the hell of the yi-dah or hungry ghosts (also where smokers end up, compelled to belch fire and fumes), then the world of animals (din-dö), a savage struggle for survival by the strongest, and lastly and most gruesome of all, the hot and cold hells (tsa-tang).

Retribution is always exact in the different hells, the greedy ending up hungry, the well-clothed naked, the hunter as hunted and so on. However, damnation is not eternal for in each hell there is an aspect of the bodhisattva Pawa Chenrezi who will aid the sufferer to escape to one of the heavens; particularly powerful assistance can be obtained by repeating his mantra, the 'om mani padme hum', each syllable of which is associated with one of the six hells, which will help to outweigh sins and gain release.

The counterpart of the hells is a variety of heavens which have less strongly marked characteristics. Some ten of these could be enumerated by the lamas: the four of the Guardians of the Four Directions, two associated with the zenith and nadir, and then the four of the great saviour deities, Jitsen Dölma, Guru Rinpoche, Pawa Chenrezi and Buddha Opame. That of Pawa Chenrezi is known as the Ri-goh Potala Deva-chen Shingum and that of Opame simply as Deva-chen Shingum (4). Although the heavens, like the hells, can be ranked into a hierarchy of more and less preferable with Buddha Opame's at the apex, the basic contrast is

a polar one -- heaven or hell -- the one unpleasant whichever compartment might be reached and to be avoided at all costs, and the other a desirable place, the different compartments corresponding to differences in temperament and karmic merit so that the spirit will be attracted to the one which will suit it best.

In trying to visualise or describe heaven people very frequently use the metaphor of a 'hotel': heaven is a place of comfort and ease, there are beds to recline on, pleasant surroundings, fine food and drink are brought when commanded and every whim can be easily satisfied without having to work for it oneself. Heaven is a haven, a respite from the trials of rebirth rather than a renunciation of the whole cycle; seen in this way the system can be aligned with theological dogma without undue strain for it is only in a subsequent rebirth specifically in the world of men that another chance for complete liberation will present itself.

Doctrinally speaking the gods and goddesses of the rituals have no more (but no less) reality than the illusory perceptions of selfhood and the world which cloud the minds of those enmeshed in the delusions of existence; they are purely mental creations although they can have real effects, just as a dream can, and fulfil a purpose in directing the worshipper towards religious goals. Ultimately what is important is principles, the bringing together of wisdom and compassion, knowledge and love in the realisation of the unity of the cosmos. But for the Tamangs it is undoubtedly the case that the deities with whom they interact ritually have a real and independent existence. They are associated with the qualities of knowledge and love but they are not just symbols of these qualities; rather, they embody them and can impart them to human worshippers when prevailed upon. The worshippers' goal of a life in which suffering has been mitigated followed by an after-death existence in the pleasant surroundings of heaven, freed from suffering, can thus be realised through divine assistance.

The tse-chu ritual as I have noted is based on a negotiable strategy for obtaining divine assistance. Its devotional content is rather meagre and it does not give the impression of greatly involving the participants' hearts. Of the twin qualities of wisdom and compassion it is primarily directed towards the former, in the shape of obtaining the magical attainment of life (tse-tup) from the gods. The second ritual considered here, the nyung-ne, is directed much more towards the second pole, towards eliciting the compassion of Chenrezi. It is

regarded as one of the most important events in the religious calendar and in one way or another involves most of the community; in fact it is the highest expression of lay devotion that is possible, accruing great merit to the participants and disseminating benefits throughout the community.

The nyung-ne

Two nyung-ne are performed in the Syabru area each year. The first alternates between the gompas of Mang-zhe and Syabru and falls in the holy fourth Tibetan month sometime in May or early June. This is the larger and more popular. The second, held at Gompagang in October, is said to have been instituted some 120 years ago by Teba Kamsa Wangdi to atone for the sins committed during the Hindu festival of Dasain. Both are attended by people drawn from all the surrounding hamlets. As the performance lasts three days, needs many lamas and attracts a lot of people to the concluding feast, a correspondingly greater number of sponsors are required - 17 in the case of the May event, who each contribute between Rs.100 and Rs.200 towards the payment of the lamas, the provision of flour and butter for the tormas and the lamps, and tea, beer and rice to be served in the temple and at the concluding feast. Unlike the village tse-chu in which sponsorship has an obligatory character, this is a voluntary duty whereby the rich or pious seek to earn themselves additional merit through employing their money (and time) in the service of religion.

The day before the ceremony is due to begin the sponsors and the lamas assemble all the necessary ritual equipment and materials and begin to construct the altar tormas, prepare the gumpa, clean the butter-lamps and make the many hundreds of tso tormas. The altar is elaborately and beautifully decorated with many hanging thankas, silk cloths, flowers and shining butter-lamps massed in row after row, but its basic form is simple, the main focus being a torma of pure butter for Chenrezi; butter is the purest (and most expensive) ritual substance. Only a few other deities are represented on the altar, including Opame and Tsepame, but many hundreds of tso tormas or rice or flour daubed with red dye are prepared and arranged around the altar. While any competent helper can lend assistance with these, the main altar tormas are always prepared by a specialist.

The first day is given over to the recitation of the liturgical texts interspersed with long periods of devotional singing of the mane

songs by the participants, accompanied by circumambulations of the gompa and prostrations to the Three Gems (the Precious Ones). Meanwhile a makeshift kitchen is set up near the gompa where five or six men from among the sponsors who are not participating in the actual ceremony prepare quantities of butter tea and beer for the participants and cook the midday meal of rice with a meat and vegetable sauce. Some ten lamas conduct the service under the leadership of the lopen (senior lama). The other participants number about forty, more old people than young, more women than men. In fact this is the only occasion on which women, who normally remain very much in the background in ritual affairs, participate on equal terms with men. During breaks in the service people are free to wander outside or return briefly to their homes if they live nearby, but the atmosphere is generally very quiet and restrained. Many people tell their rosary beads and there is a continuous murmuring of mantras.

The second day is known as kupa (Tib. lkugs-pa), literally 'mute'. On this day people remain in the temple; no food or drink may be taken (for nyung means 'fast') and a strict silence is observed except for the recitation of mantras and prayers. Numerous prostrations are performed to Chenrezi and the Precious Ones and prayers are recited expressing devotion and asking for the forgiveness of sins and help in attaining heaven.

On the third day virtually all the people of the village and surrounding hamlets put on their best clothes and walk up to the gompa. They remain quietly outside until the final liturgies are completed and then enter to present white scarves to the senior lama, receiving in return his blessing either by touching foreheads with him or having the dorje sceptre placed on their heads. The tso tormas are then distributed to everybody, participants and visitors alike, and all adjourn to the courtyard outside the gompa where a meal is served, the first the celebrants will have eaten for nearly 48 hours. Drink flows freely and the atmosphere soon becomes very animated with groups of men and women sitting chatting or forming up to begin dancing.

The nyung-ne retains the same core theme of the union of man and divinity or, esoterically, man and cosmos but the thematic pattern and processual form are different. The emphasis now is on penitence and abnegation, rather than elaborate gift-giving, as the means to evoke the compassion of Chenrezi and the dramatic form, through its isolation of the worshippers, makes a more determined effort to overcome the pivo-

tal role of the priest as mediator by uniting the worshippers directly with the deity.

The shift in thematic pattern is signified by the appearance of Chenrezi, not Guru Rinpoche, as the focal deity of the ritual. Guru Rinpoche, greatly revered though he is and in many ways all-powerful, is particularly associated with the spreading and protection of religion, the production and burial of hidden texts, and the defeat of the enemies of religion whether these be human or demonic. Numerous legends associate him with magical transformations and various yogic tricks (5). The power he grants is most concerned with upholding life and religion in the present world by suppressing all demonic and heretical threats to them. To put it another way, he preserves the conditions under which enlightenment (heaven) may be achieved. Chenrezi, however, is associated with extending mercy and compassion to all beings in the six hells or realms of existence and leading them towards the heaven of Opame and eventual enlightenment. As a bodhisattva he has temporarily foregone complete liberation himself in order to help others find release from suffering. The mere repetition of Chenrezi's mantra 'om mani padme hum' is sufficient to bring about identification with him and so lead towards salvation. Chenrezi appears in different guises in the six hells and in another form as the Judge of the Dead and again as an aspect of the Buddha Opame so that at every stage from existence through death to rebirth in heaven his aid is available to help his devotees overcome the effects of karma, not by cancelling them out but by transcending them through the immediate realisation of enlightenment. Thus participation in the nyung-ne particularly commends itself to those who desire help in some way and to the elderly who feel their time of dying may be near.

The significance of the fasting and silence is clearly associated with this aim of achieving identification with Chenrezi. By removing the participants from the normal demands of life - work and social and sexual intercourse - and denying them the grosser material pleasures of food, drink and conversation it amounts almost to a brief period of sensory deprivation, a stilling of the ceaseless activity of the sense-perceptions and mind which give rise to karmic delusion and desire. Cleansed of karmic obscurations the devotee can transmute sensual desire into desire for enlightenment and union with Chenrezi. By evoking in themselves the active but unconditioned compassion of Chenrezi towards all other beings so Chenrezi himself becomes manifest. Indeed, the

asceticism of the nyung-ne can be seen as a lay parallel of the lamas' retreat (tsam) performed as a ritual service to the various gods before their power can be manifested in ritual. Whereas in the tse-chu it is the lamas, befitted by their ritual service, who mediate the attainment of life between the gods and the worshippers, the nyung-ne seeks to render the worshipper himself fit to unite with Chenrezi.

There is perhaps an unstated paradox at the heart of this ritual in that once the worshipper has achieved identification with Chenrezi there is a logical and moral demand that the devotee himself renounce liberation and adopt the bodhisattva path (cf Schumann, 1973: 178). In the face of this demand, which would preclude the pleasures of heaven which laymen see as their reward for a pious life, there is a tendency to retreat from the interpretation of self-identification with Chenrezi to one of dependency on his mercy.

The particular interest of the nyung-ne lies in the way in which its symbols contrast with those of the tse-chu in emphasizing the ideas of penitence and renunciation. As in the tse-chu, offerings are made to the deities to engage their attention and concern and involve them in the ritual, but the lay participants are now much more centrally engaged in the proceedings. By attending in their old clothes without jewellery and finery and by making the numerous prostrations and circumambulations they are abasing themselves before Chenrezi. Rather than the negotiable strategy of the tse-chu gift offerings with their almost overt expectation of a return prestation, this ritual employs an altruistic strategy: a setting of great beauty is prepared and very fine offerings of pure butter etc. presented but no coercive demand for compassion is made. Rather, the worshippers through their silence and fasting purify themselves and concentrate on evoking the love of Chenrezi by letting him witness the suffering in which they live and their true repentance for the sins which have brought it about.

The symbolism of renunciation also refers to another powerful theme of the ritual - preparation for death; as I noted, Chenrezi's love and assistance at this time is particularly crucial. Although in actuality the ritual performance depends on the generosity of the sponsors, its theme of renunciation suggests a severing of ties with the material and social ties of the world which keep men bound to the karmic cycle of births; it is in fact a social death and rebirth in the divine heaven of Opame with the assistance of Chenrezi. This of course is precisely what the participants hope will be their fate after their real death,

and so the ritual can also be seen as a dummy run, a mimetic rehearsal, for real death and rebirth.

The processual form strengthens this interpretation. The participants first retire into the temple - spatially separate from but still a part of the village - and cut themselves off from all normal roles and from social intercourse. In this intermediate state, which is also characteristic of the period immediately after death, they are directed by the lamas to meditate on and evoke the qualities of Chenrezi - , just as the dead person's spirit will be subsequently guided. Having aligned themselves with the path of Chenrezi and obtained his divine mercy (for it is never withheld to the sincere worshipper), the participants emerge 'born again' into the world of the village where their fellows greet them with a lavish party to signal their reincorporation into society in a now spiritually fortified state (and the lavish party itself corresponds well enough with the sort of life the Tamangs expect to find in heaven).

The ritual has transformed sensual desire into spiritual desire - and while it is sensual desire (greed, anger, envy) which entraps men in the wheel of existence and the cycle of rebirths bringing yet more suffering, spiritual desire releases him into the care of Chenrezi. At the same time, by performing this mimetic rehearsal for death one makes it more likely that the same result will come about when real death takes place. And, as Chapter Eight will make clear, the dramatic form of the nyung-ne is itself a parallel of the death rituals: the sober penitential attitudes and clothing correspond to the solemnity of death, the separation of the temple setting with the funeral progress and the subsequent intermediate status of the soul seeking Chenrezi's mercy, and the concluding party signifying the transformed status of the participants with the joyous gyewa which brings to an end the death rites, the spirit having attained the heaven of Opame.

Conclusion

Although classed together as offering rituals, the tse-chu and nyung-ne have related but different core themes and symbols. They are complementary rituals, the one concerned in the Tamang setting with the attainment of life - provided by Guru Rinpoche and obtained through a coercive strategy of offerings - and the other with the quest for the loving mercy of Chenrezi to aid the worshipper to reach heaven. Both rituals are directed towards changing the person rather than his environment but in the former it is the lama who is the focal figure and

mediator, while in the latter the worshipper himself undergoes privation and hardship to bring him closer to divinity. The Tamang appreciation of the rituals, although superficially more self-interested, corresponds in structure and direction with the more elevated goals prescribed by Buddhist doctrine - the uniting of wisdom and compassion in the worshipper in order to bring about the enlightenment which will free him from the karmic cycle of rebirths. The opportunity for the most radical transformation of all comes with death, when the deceased has a final chance to take possession of the liberation which is implicit in the death experience.

Notes to Chapter 6

(1) See von Ffurer-Haimendorf (1964: 238-41), Waddell (op cit: 428-32), Snellgrove (1957) and Ortner (op cit: Ch 6) for other accounts of this ritual.

(2) There is an interesting contrast here with the attitude of Theravada Buddhism where worshippers make food offerings to the gods but never consume them afterwards. In Burma Buddha worship and offerings are seen as a means to cleanse the mind of the worshipper (Spiro, 1971: 194). In Thailand such offerings are never consumed and are said to be made in the spirit of pure asceticism (Tambiah, 1970: 341). In Sri Lanka there is a specific prohibition against eating food which has been offered in the temple (Gombrich, 1971).

(3) Cf Indrabhūti's 'Jñānasiddhi': "Just as one sees one's own reflection in a mirror; so the dharma-kāya is seen in the Mirror of Wisdom" (quoted in Govinda, op cit: 113).

(4) Although obviously derived from the Tibetan scheme the Tamang concepts of heaven and hell are less complex and do seem to exhibit some doctrinal divergences, notably in including all the regions of rebirth among the hells without much distinction between better and worse rebirths. It could perhaps be argued that some of the elaborations of the Tibetan system are redundant, since what interests the Tamangs is the polar contrast between heaven and hell, rather than the subtle gradations of levels.

(5) Countless examples are to be found in the biography of his exploits, published as The Tibetan Book of the Great Liberation (Evans-Wentz, 1971 (1954)).

C H A P T E R S E V E N

KNOWLEDGE AND POWER: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS SPECIALISTS

Having examined in some detail the theory and practice of the three major ritual modes - supplication, exorcism and worship - it is possible to consider in more depth the relationship between Tamang shamanism and Buddhism by shifting the focus from rituals to the religious specialists who conduct them, for it is they who play a pivotal role in the religious life of the community, using their knowledge and power to control the religious symbols and myths which underpin ritual performances. Nevertheless, the relationship is a symbiotic one. Much as the community may depend on their expertise to control the threatening forces which menace them and to intercede on their behalf with the gods, the specialists also require social legitimation by the community in order to function effectively. Moreover, there is a tendency for their religious authority to spill over into secular fields, leading them to use their influence to buttress their own position and occasionally giving rise to tensions between specialists and laymen or between proponents of different ideologies.

In seeking to throw further light on the relationship between different religious complexes and their specialists, two aspects of their role are of particular importance. One is their social organisation as a body of men who must ensure the survival and continuation of their doctrine or tradition. This aspect embraces the recruitment, training, initiation and subsequent career and duties of the specialist - all that goes to establish his fitness to act in an appropriate capacity. The second component is concerned less with the acquisition and transmission of knowledge than with their power and the validation of that power which always derives from something more than the mere control of knowledge, be it a question of hereditary right, divine selection, initiatory test, or some other route. It is this which definitively separates and marks out the religious specialist from the ordinary run of men.

How this power is acquired and validated will lead to a differential categorization and valuation of various types of specialists which enables us to go beyond the overt similarities and contrasts of their roles to see how they are interlinked in an underlying structural pattern.

The dominant religious specialists in the Tamang context are the lamas and the shamans and it is on them that attention must be concentrated. However, to uncover the complete pattern it will be necessary to include various subcategories - reincarnate and magician lamas, soothsayers and tribal priests. Generally the attempt to find a neat categorization of the relationship between different types of religious specialists has been unsatisfactory precisely because it has looked only at priests and shamans and has sought a single variable to distinguish them, whereas in fact several variables must be employed.

One of the most elegant models has been put forward by Dumont & Pocock (1959), who suggest that the priest and shaman are opposite poles of a communications system: the priest is the transmitter of messages through prayer and offering, while the shaman is the receiver, the mouthpiece of the deities who impart their commands, advice and knowledge through him. Unfortunately it would seem to be inapplicable here for, as has been shown, the Tamang shaman no less than the lama has the power to control the gods and is by no means a passive spirit medium; either specialist may establish a relationship of coercion over the supernatural world which is far more aggressive than Dumont & Pocock's formulation would suggest.

Turning to a different point of view, Mandelbaum (1966) associates the hereditary priest with the 'transcendental' aspects of religion, transcendental here being linked with the dominant ideology of society, its function to maintain and legitimate the existing social order. The shaman on the other hand is associated with the 'pragmatic' complex which concerns itself with individual cases, with course corrections in the overall flow and with attempts to beat the system by accruing personal advantage. Again there is some truth in this, in that the hereditary lama is closely connected with the dominant ideology but he is nevertheless frequently involved in a pragmatic search for cures which overlaps the shaman's role.

Berreman (1964) maintains much the same contrast but in even

stronger terms. For him the Brahman priest is not only the upholder of the dominant ideology, but is no more than a "religious technician" with a vested interest in the status quo, performing highly stereotyped rituals which stress the authority of the 'great tradition', while the shaman is described as "a cultural innovator and policy-maker". This formulation is misleading for Berreman's own analysis shows that conservatism and innovation are not defining features of roles but functions of the situations specialists find themselves in: the Brahman with his hereditary jaṁmāni ties to undemanding clients which inhibit change, and the shaman who is in fierce competition with his fellows for business and so must seek out novelty.

Mandelbaum's distinction is reminiscent of Durkheim's stress on religion as a collectivist enterprise involving a moral community (the church), while magic is individualist in character and has merely a clientele, while Berreman's formulation seems to hark back to the Weberian characterization of the priesthood as a 'cultic enterprise', formally organized, normatively constituted and associated with specific social groups, magicians apparently being unconstrained by these considerations. If these insights do not entirely fit the Tamang case they will at least provide a starting point from which to extend ideas about the relationship of priest, shaman and laity.

The career of a shaman

As Chapter Five indicated, the distinctive feature of the Tamang shaman is his personal involvement with the spirit world: he is both agent and controller of the gods and demons, a position which can only be acquired through a twofold process of election and empowerment. Although by comparison with the Buddhist priesthood the shamans apparently lack formal organization the role nevertheless has a number of standardized features.

The first of these is the indication of a man's special calling through episodes of uncontrolled possession: it is the gods themselves who must signify their approval of the candidate in this fashion. In other circumstances spontaneous possession is virtually unknown in the community, so that it is invariably taken as being a divine sign.

This divine election is not necessarily a purely random event.

It is often preceded by a preliminary period of training. Moreover, there is convincing evidence that those whom it afflicts are the victims often of a particular set of social circumstances which renders the shamanic option a viable alternative. Often recruits are drawn from those who are excluded from the status in village affairs normally accorded to reasonably well-to-do families - whether by reason of poverty, incompetence, bad luck or personal characteristics which set them apart. Shamanizing not only gives them a new importance in village life but provides a useful supplementary income.

Two case studies illustrate clearly how those on the margins of village life are drawn towards shamanizing. The first concerns Nyima (see Ch. 2) whose father had died while he was still a boy. Through a complicated piece of chicanery a family with a remote claim on his inheritance got control of it, leaving Nyima with nothing. For a period of two years he trained as a shaman while still in his teens and made substantial progress in mastering the techniques and controlling the gods. Then, when the Second World War broke out, he left the village to join the Gurkhas and was sent overseas to fight in Italy. After the war he returned to the village with his army severance pay and was gradually able to buy back land and build up a substantial cattle herd. He became one of the wealthiest and most respected men in Syabru and never again turned to shamanizing. Nowadays he invariably employs the most senior lamas for his own religious needs. He has become secure in a new status.

The second case concerns Lobsang and shows something of the way in which possession comes about. Lobsang is a man in his early thirties who recently remarried after his first wife left him to emigrate to India. His inheritance, a mere 3 hal, was very small, scarcely enough to support his new wife and baby and a son by the previous marriage. His position has worsened as debts have accrued. It has not been helped by the unwillingness of his wife to contribute wholeheartedly to the work of the household and Lobsang is rapidly reaching the point where he may have no choice but to emigrate himself and become a day labourer. His interest in shamanizing has always been strong and for some months he has been under the tutelage of a guru, besides holding frequent seances himself at which he assists the officiating shaman.

One evening after attending a funeral (the pollution from which would have weakened his life-power) Lobsang appeared at the house of his half-brother Singi, half-naked and smeared with mud and ashes. He raved unintelligibly and proceeded to grab burning branches which he attempted to eat while his brother struggled to restrain him. He swung upside-down from the roof beams and pressed handfuls of grass and mud into his mouth before rushing off shrieking into the night. Later, helped by friends who had found him, he returned to his own house and although still incoherent began an impromptu seance helped by his wife, using a brass plate as a drum and making offerings of wheat and beer. He was rapidly possessed by Dabla, the village god, who complained at the fact that his worship had been neglected that year by the villagers and the lha-bdun or tribal priest charged with his service. After the departure of this god Lobsang became more his old self and calmed down considerably.

Several interpretations lend themselves to this performance, which was clearly highly untoward as far as the villagers themselves were concerned. In one way it certainly seemed to contain elements of what Lewis terms an "oblique aggressive strategy" - the attempt by the marginal and powerless to assert themselves over dominant interests. Lobsang's possession follows this pattern neatly. The wealthy land-owning lineage charged with the worship of the god concerned with village land and prosperity had neglected their duties. Lobsang was a poor man who was on the point of losing what remained of his lands and with them the last vestiges of his status in the village; he became possessed by the very god who has a hand in his own potential rescue or downfall. Looked at in this way Lobsang could be seen to be drawing attention to his plight and castigating the wealthier lineages for their seeming indifference to his need for assistance. (Lewis, 1971: 32)

The second aspect of the case stems from Lobsang's prior training as a shaman. To be a successful shaman involves establishing the authenticity of one's calling and additionally convincing people that one can actually control the spirit world in the claimed way. Having undertaken the training Lobsang was here giving public witness to the fact that he was chosen by the gods to impart their wishes and that he could control the experience without lapsing

into insanity - in effect, declaring his new-found status. That this was no mere psychological aberration but an important social drama is suggested by the fact that his possession did not occur when he was alone or far from the village, when it would have been valueless as a validation of his power, but just after a funeral when the whole village was already emotionally highly charged and receptive to such a breakthrough of supernatural forces.

The second significant step in the shaman's career, following some divine indication of his calling, is his apprenticeship to a teacher or guru. In the case of hereditary shamans the teacher will be sought from among his kin - usually the oldest and most respected member of the clan. Non-hereditary shamans must prevail upon another already qualified to provide the training and, if someone cannot be found locally, they may move temporarily to another region. The most renowned guru in the Syabru area, now an old man in his 80s living in Gompagang, has been responsible for training eight or nine successors, some his own kinsmen and some not. The relationship, known by the Nepali terms guru-sisya (teacher-pupil), is sealed by the teacher's acceptance of gifts of beer, ceremonial scarves and a small sum of money. Further on-going payment may also be demanded, either in the form of cash or labour. Henceforth it is indissoluble, persisting through life, on through the death ceremony of the teacher in which the pupil participates, and into the afterlife when the guru joins the ranks of other ancestors (me-me) and continues to assist his pupils.

The teaching consists largely in the pupil accompanying his guru on the occasion of kurim and other healing ceremonies and to the great festivals where he begins by acting as an assistant. He does not yet don the costume of the shaman but early on learns how to accompany the drumming and to make the tormas. Gradually he masters the names and forms of a hundred or more deities and the offerings appropriate to each (milk, meat, blood, liquor, eggs, money) and the myths and stories relating them to the area and the tradition of shamanizing. He also learns how to hold the drum, gripping it in his left hand in an upright position and beating the rhythm with the curved drumstick held in his right, the significance of the two sides and the handle, and how to sing with his mouth just behind the drumskin so that the voice acquires an eerie resonance.

He learns the special songs of the bombo and the invocation of the deities in the language of the gurus. Less tangibly he is also gaining experience of the sort of problems the shaman has to deal with, the appropriate answers to give and the prayers and sacrifices to recommend.

As he progresses he learns divination using the drum, the making of protective charms and amulets and, most importantly of all, he learns how to master the spirits themselves, controlling his own possession experiences and entrusting himself to the protection of the ancestor shamans who watch over him at the time of the trance, for he undergoes great danger during the period when his mind is roaming free of his body.

It is said that if one were to work at it full-time all this could be mastered in about a year, but in practice most shamans seem to take two to four years before they are ready to wear the costume and operate alone. Some shamans say that the training is never done- as long as you live there is more to learn. This of course is true, for although great importance is attached to the notion that shamanic knowledge is passed down in an unbroken chain stemming from the first shamans, this ideology cannot be taken at face value. There are numerous factors other than the mode of transmission which both constrain and enlarge the tradition. The shaman must be prepared to adapt his seances to local conditions, to incorporate new items in his repertoire and to adjust old ones to fit changing circumstances as, for example, when a deity like the village-god Dabla loses prominence or a Newar spirit becomes more important. His own experiences and personality too will produce variations in the tradition. As Macdonald has noted,

"Upon pre-existent beliefs the jhakri 'grafts' his own interpretations, fruit of his own experience and his personal training..... This integration becomes definitive only when the jhakri integrally transmits his knowledge to a pupil [... who], in turn, interprets and embellishes the material in terms of his own competency and experience....."
(Macdonald, 1976b: 326).

But all these factors amount to no more than a rearranging of the elements rather than a reinterpretation of the framework itself, which is more deeply constrained by other factors - particularly its opposition to the ideology of Buddhism and the fierce competition

between shamans for business.

Once qualified to practise (there are apparently no elaborate initiation ceremonies such as are held by the Kham Magars in western Nepal (Watters, 1975)) the shaman must find business wherever he can. Unlike the lamas who have a virtual monopoly on crucial life-cycle rites and have certain hereditary links with their clients, shamans depend on generating the conviction that they can achieve results. They are much more goal-oriented than lamas who, provided they maintain certain minimal standards, have a secure place in the social structure. They must also overcome a certain amount of local scepticism and often seem to do best not in their natal village where they are too well-known but in villages some distance away where their reputation is less open to scrutiny.

Gradually the shaman builds up a regular clientele, responding to their ad hoc needs for amulets, charms and curative ceremonies. He leads groups on pilgrimages and attends death ceremonies. As his reputation grows he acquires pupils of his own whom he in turn trains. He gradually achieves an established status in the village as a significant religious leader and with luck his fortunes will improve correspondingly.

Categories of shamans

Two cross-cutting systems are locally employed in categorizing shamans, one based on their moral attitude and the other on their route to the acquisition of power. As I shall show, a similar dual system is also applied to the lamas.

The second aspect of the categorization is based on an opposition between innate power and acquired power. Although divine selection and subsequent training are an integral feature of the shamanic tradition there are a variety of ways in which these come about. Most powerful of all shamans are those who are self-evolved or naturally constituted who have spontaneously acquired both divine blessing and intuitive knowledge. These are known as rang-shin bombo. Rather similar are the tsu-shin who are first possessed by the gods usually in some remote place in the forest and then taught by them during the course of the possession. By definition there can be no standardized training or transmission of techniques in these cases but their very rarity suggests either that they are semi-mythological figures or ideal types, or that a certain 'routinization of charisma'

has taken place. In other words, that even ecstasy must accept certain limitations on its appearance and can only be comfortably accepted when it falls into standardized patterns, a feeling voiced by those who employ shamans: they prefer those whose antecedents are well-vouched for rather than true 'wild men' whose credentials are unknown.

The most common type of shaman in the Langtang region partakes of the characteristics of both innate and acquired power. Known as the gyü-phe rig-dsin or members of the lineage of knowledge-holders they claim a direct hereditary linkage with the ancestors but must nevertheless receive instruction in the way described above. However the fact that this instruction is provided by kinsmen strengthens the claims to authenticity of this branch for they are directly linked with the first shaman Me-me Bengyap and the source of shamanic inspiration Naru-bön both by heredity and by religious filiation. The tutelary spirits pass from father to son, or occasionally from uncle to nephew, while the knowledge passes via the same route through the series of dyadic teacher-pupil links.

Lastly there are those like Lobsang described in the previous section - the phe-bön or instructed shamans who must work their passage the hard way, by attaching themselves to a guru, gradually mastering the techniques and waiting for indications of divine selection to be made manifest.

If the route to the acquisition of power varying from wholly innate to wholly acquired be imagined as one vector, then the second which cross-cuts it and may be applied to any of the four types listed above is that of moral quality which informs the practice of the art. Three types are distinguished in terms of the colour symbolism of white, red and black, the first two colours also echoing the colours of the offerings which are made. The white shaman (kar-che - 'white offering') is one whose rites remain congruent with Buddhist injunctions against the taking of life; he makes only the white offerings of milk, butter and flour (or rice). By contrast the mar-che ('red offering') or red shaman achieves his results through sacrificing animals, usually cocks but occasionally goats, although his intentions remain basically benevolent. The third type is the black shaman (nagpo), a malevolent magician who has mastered the black arts of killing enemies and bringing harm upon people, powers which for a fee the client can have used against others. This type is under-

standably feared, although no-one doubts the eventual bad karma which will be earned as a result of his activities. Although it is said for example that the grandfather (RF) of the present shaman of Wangbi was such a man, it is impossible to discover just how common this type is, since no black shaman will broadcast his accomplishments to outsiders nor are clients likely to admit to murderous designs on other members of the community.

Of the red and white shamans, the red predominates. They justify their right to sacrifice in terms of a curious story. It seems that in the distant past the rituals of men and the rituals of fowls were conducted quite separately. Men used to sacrifice chickens in their rites and chickens used to sacrifice men in theirs, until one day the rājā (king) of that time declared that this indiscriminate slaughter could go on no longer. To decide the issue he set a contest between men and chickens: the first group to build a bridge over the river by the following dawn would be the victors. At day-break the inspection took place: the men had completed their bridge but the chickens, having no limbs or tools to aid them, were unable to make theirs meet in the middle. So men were declared the winners and the king decreed that henceforth only they would do the sacrificing.

Thus, theoretically, practising shamans can be located at varying points in a field defined by two axes - that of innate versus acquired power and that of moral versus immoral practice. But as it happens the most common type of all is that which occupies the most ambiguous status with respect to both axes - the red, blood-sacrificing shaman who is neither wholly pure nor wholly evil, of the gyü-phe rig-dsin type whose powers are partially innate and partially acquired.

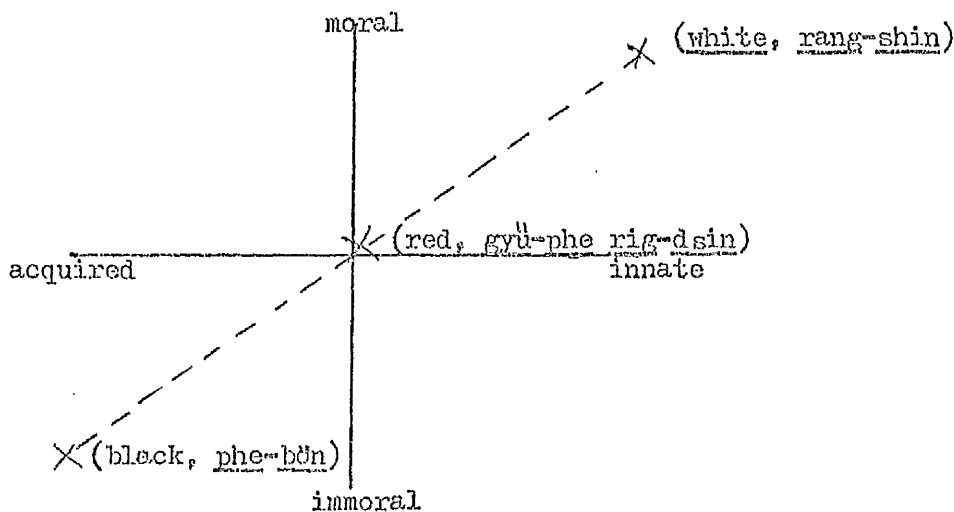


Fig 12 - Classification of shamans .

Shamans and society

The shaman is set apart from other men by divine selection and by his access to power, marked out by his calling for a different fate than the conventional one. Partly because of this he is less constrained by the norms of ordinary behaviour and is less susceptible to situations of potential danger.

This aspect of the role is particularly noticeable at funerals where pollution is prevalent and the atmosphere emotionally charged. The shaman has a specific part to play in that it is he who conveys the offerings to Me lha, god of the fire, during a cremation. (He is also the one who hurls the offering of the gyek-tor to the hindering demons outside the gumpa precincts during temple ceremonies). He also acts as a joker during the funeral, releasing tensions and contravening usual standards of decorum, even debunking the lamas themselves. If his joking sometimes threatens to get out of hand and disrupt the ceremony it is always taken in good part both by the congregation and by the lamas themselves. It may also be noted in passing that in general the personal behaviour of shamans is more extreme than the norm; they tend to drink more, work less and engage in more sexual activity than other men.

In the light of Douglas's analysis of the joker it is interesting that it is the shaman who is here granted this latitude, for she notes that in the African context the joker is contrasted with those undergoing rites of passage. Whereas they are in marginal states he is secure in his position in the social structure. At the central African funeral it is the friend who is uninvolved in the transformations of succession and inheritance who jokes, never the closely involved kinsmen (Douglas, 1978: 109). The shaman has much the same position: although more frequently exposed to danger and pollution than ordinary men in the course of his dealings with the sick and with the spirit world, he is also more resistant than they by virtue of his powers. Like the African joking partner he is secure in his role in the social structure, being neither implicated in the flux of the affairs of the bereaved nor affected by the pollution of the dead.

It is difficult in fact to equate the Tamang shaman in any way with the manifestations of peripheral possession cults, as described by Lewis (1971:32ff). There is little to indicate that he stands

apart from the social structure or that he appeals particularly to the marginal and powerless elements in society. On the contrary, he is consulted by all sections of the community and plays a part even in such central rites as funerals. In fact it may be more convincing to see the shaman as in some respects complementary to the Buddhist priesthood by acting as the absorber of the impurity associated with death and the danger associated with demons. Despite the primary role of the lamas in funerals and exorcisms they never directly handle corpses, effigies of the deceased or tormas into which they have conjured the demons, calling instead on laymen to undertake these tasks or the shaman himself whenever available. His experience in dealing directly with malevolent forces enables them to maintain the necessary purity to conduct the rituals, although it may be presumed to have ultimately deleterious effects on the shaman's own life power.

If the Tamang shaman is not a leader of peripheral cults, nor is he the solitary pragmatist that some of the writers quoted at the beginning of this chapter suggest. This is made clear by his role as leader of the annual pilgrimage to the series of sacred lakes collectively known as Gosāikund, an event which generates at least as much local interest and involvement as any of the more conventional Buddhist rituals and an occasion on which the Buddhist lamas are completely eclipsed. In the South Asian context pilgrimage is generally viewed as a Buddhist or Hindu phenomenon and indeed one of the foremost students of the subject tends to associate pilgrimage in general with 'universal' or 'historical' religions (Turner, 1974b). This event, which I shall describe in some detail, is an important indication that pilgrimage is by no means confined to world religions. It also tends to add weight to the doubts which have recently been cast (Sallnow, 1981) on Turner's (1974a; 1974b) promotion of the concept of 'communitas' - the periodic overturning of normal roles and statuses - to a central role in pilgrimage phenomena. Although a general loosening of behaviour can be observed during the pilgrimage - which lasts from three to five days depending on the village of residence - Tamangs attend with a variety of utilitarian as well as religious motives in mind, travel in their own village groups, and at the Gosāikund site do not mingle with the Hindu pilgrims who also come for the occasion. As Sallnow (*ibid*) notes, "communitas cannot comprehend the complex interplay between the social relations of pilgrimage and those associated with secular activities".

The significance of the pilgrimage, known in Nepali as the Janai, for the many thousands of Hindu pilgrims who attend from all over Nepal (and even further afield) has been briefly explored by Macdonald (1975c). The principal lake is the site of Siva in the guise of Mahādeo and the faithful go there with their Brahmin priests to worship and bathe in the holy water before receiving their new sacred thread (N - Janai). However, the ceremony of the sacred thread has no significance for the Tamangs who, even if they knew what it represented, would not be entitled to wear it. Nevertheless they attend the pilgrimage in considerable numbers, although keeping apart from the Hindus, converging on the sacred site from all the villages of the area. No doubt various non-religious motives also impel them, for the occasion is also a marriage market, a time for meeting kinsmen and ritual friends from other parts, for fixing up trade deals and for having a good time, as well as a money-spinner in the form of the accommodation which can be sold to the Hindu pilgrims (see Ch. 2). The most striking feature though is the fact that each village group is led by its own shaman for the whole five days which the pilgrimage may take, and the genuinely devotional atmosphere which infuses the occasion.

For these Tamang pilgrims the name and associations evoked by the site are quite different than for the Hindus. The latter believe that the lakes and the river Trisuli which supposedly rises in them were created when Siva, after drinking the poison thrown up by the churning of the ocean making amrt (N)(ambrosia), rushed to the cool Himālaya to assuage the terrible burning in his throat and struck a rock with his trident (N - trisul) from which the water gushed, forming the lakes and the river (Anderson, 1971; Macdonald, op. cit..)

But the Tamangs know the site as Kyo and tell quite different stories of the origin of the lakes, although they too preserve the good/evil contrast of the higher lake Gosāikund, site of Mahādeo, and the lower evil Nāgkund inhabited by a water-sprite. They associate the lakes with two powerful spirits of the dū ma-bōn type, sisters called Chu-nag (Black Water) and Chu-kar (White Water). At first these spirits manifested themselves as two small lakes near Lungi, not far from Syabru, but the older sister instructed the younger (Black Water) to continue alone as she was too tired to go on. (In another version the younger sister was offended by the offering

of a polluted cloth by a lama and left of her own accord.) The younger sister continued to Kyo where she materialized as the Black Lake, but made no effort to tell her sister of the fine location she had found. Angered by this deception the elder sister followed her, materialized herself as the White Lake (Gosaikund) and laid a curse upon her sister saying, "you have betrayed me, henceforth no-one will ever again worship you". And to this day people do not worship at the Nāgkund but pass quickly by with eyes averted for there are many stories of people who have drowned after falling into the clutches of the water-sprite which dwells within.

Tamangs also associate the White Lake with Mahādeo, but this deity has different connotations for them. For the Hindus Mahādeo, as mentioned above, is an incarnation of Siva while according to Buddhist orthodoxy Maha deva, the Great God, is the leader of the grouping known as lha, powerful but still subordinate to the high Buddhist gods in every way (1). However to the shamans he is one of the most powerful of the Gurus or tutelary deities and thus has a special relationship with them. And for everybody as a localised source of sacred power he is one of the greatest of the territorial gods who play a crucial part in protecting Syabru and the surrounding area.

The pilgrimage is the subject of talk and excited expectation months before the actual day, for it falls in the period of heaviest agricultural work and provides welcome relief from the ceaseless drudgery of harvesting, weeding and ploughing at this time of year. Three days before the full moon the pilgrims from the most northerly villages - Thuman, Setang and Goljung - leave their homes, the women in new clothes and wearing all their jewellery, led by their shamans who are in full regalia. They are accompanied by their novice pupils who help with the drumming and by unmarried girl assistants who go in the vanguard carrying the da-dar arrows. Progress is slow for the shamans keep up a continuous drumming while the pilgrims dance and sing, first the men in the lead who pause to sing a verse, then the women likewise stopping to sing a reply. At each village and hamlet they pass through more pilgrims join the band; the group is pressed to accept hospitality and in return provides a display of dancing. The shamans may be prevailed upon by some households to perform a protective rite, setting up a 'world-tree' - a pine trunk with its lower branches lopped off and only a crown

of leaves remaining - round which they dance and drum.

Gradually the paths converge and parties from other villages - Wangbi, Syabru, Gompagang, Brābal, Bharku, Dhunche - join the throng with their shamans. The majority of the pilgrims are young people, the taruni (N) or 'teenagers' with whom the shamans have a special relationship. By the time they reach their destination there will be 300-400 pilgrims and 12-15 shamans present. Although the site has been known for centuries to the Tibetans, those now living in the area do not attend en masse, nor do the Tibetan speakers of villages such as Langtang. It is particularly a Tamang occasion by contrast with, for example, the predominantly Tibetan pilgrimage to Setang Gumpa in July.

After leaving the last human habitation there is still another night to be spent in cattle-herders' huts en route and a day of tough walking up through the rhododendron forests, across open pastures to the rocky slopes leading to the lakes themselves. The path to their goal is both arduous and dangerous for the demons which cause altitude sickness and falls must be eluded, as must the serpent of the Black Lake. More and more frequently the party stops while the shamans drum and call upon the place-owners to preserve the pilgrims from harm and finally everybody arrives safely.

Dancing and singing go on throughout the night and at dawn, while the Hindus and their priests are bathing in the icy waters, the Tamangs set off the circumambulate (kor-pa; Tib. bskor-ba) the lake, still led by the shamans. They do not bathe, preferring to circumscribe the divine power of the lake as they do with all sacred sites, unlike the Hindus who purify themselves by complete immersion. (Paul makes the same point with regard to Sherpa pilgrimage (1976: 149).) On this occasion the Tamangs and their shamans are not concerned with the appropriation of divine power but with paying homage to one of its principal sources. Just as the traditional lha söl was concerned with maintaining the benevolent attitude of the place-owners towards men, the Gosāikund pilgrimage is an opportunity to pay court to a Being regarded as both divinity and ruler. Like any supplicant the Tamang must on this occasion attend the god on his own terms and in his own place, whatever the difficulties of getting there. Indeed it is this sense of an audience with a great person that is expressed in the phrase for to go on a pilgrimage:

Kyo jal-bi ni-pa, 'to go and do homage at Gosāikund', jal being derived from the Tibetan mjal-ba - 'to obtain access to an honoured person, to pay one's respects'.

For the shaman the meeting is even more significant. He recreates on the physical plane the mystic journey which is an integral part of every seance and ends by meeting with the deities which he regularly incarnates. He must again travel great distances and overcome the many dangers on the way before the final meeting with his tutelaries. The internal experience of the ascent to the gods during an ecstatic trance is externalized in the public experience of the pilgrimage, which in turn lends its aura of hard reality to the ritual performance. One ritual derives significance from the other and both re-emphasise the central importance of the shaman not merely as a conduit of divine power or an intermediary, but as a leader and protector of the community who on its behalf is renewing the sources of his power and hence increasing the benefits which he will be able to bring them (2).

Buddhism and the role of the lamas

There are certain obvious similarities with the shamans to be traced in the way village lamas are selected and trained but at the same time various historical and social factors have had a distinctive impact on their position. The most significant of these lies in the fact that Tamang Buddhism, unlike Buddhism in most other societies, supports no indigenous monastic system whatsoever, nor is there any indication that it has in the past or will in the foreseeable future. This is probably because the low level of the economy is incapable of creating the two necessary ingredients simultaneously; surplus wealth and surplus labour. Instead Tamang Buddhism has a sort of symbiotic relationship with its Tibetan counterpart; it is aligned with it in theory and ritual practice but has not developed the more differentiated and complex institutional arrangements of the parent body on which it has always relied to give it its main impulse. Thus factors external to Tamang society have played their part in the development of the religious system found there at the present time.

Also of great importance have been the changing political circumstances in Tibet over the last 30 years. Before 1950 a relatively free interchange of personnel could take place between the monasteries of Tibet and the Buddhist borderlands on the Nepalese side of the frontier, it being fairly common for Nepalese lamas to gain part of

their education at such establishments. The most senior lama in Syabru was one of the last to benefit from this system, receiving his training from a tulku (Tib. sprul-sku) or reincarnate lama named Gyapche Temba of Dukar monastery near Kyirong, 4 or 5 days journey to the north. (3) This lama is now responsible in his turn for teaching a number of novices and the fact that he represents a direct link in the lineage of transmission of the pure Tibetan tradition has much to do with the regard in which he is held as an authoritative and holy teacher.

The Chinese re-assertion of control in Tibet in 1950 uprooted not only ordinary people but great numbers of Tibetan lamas who have since made their home in Nepal. Some of these men have remained closely associated with particular refugee communities while others have settled in Tamang communities, giving a new impetus to the training of Tamang lamas and imparting more advanced teachings. These men include both tulku reincarnations and magician-priests as well as ordinary lamas. In addition to their influence in rural areas the establishment of well-endowed and thriving monasteries in the region of Bodhnath in the Kathmandu Valley has taken place. These have become new centres of learning, changing the orientation of village lamas away from Tibet to the north where they once looked for inspiration, to Kathmandu to the south. Once or twice a year many village lamas make the round trip to Kathmandu both for trade and to visit the holy places, staying at Bodhnath and worshipping there. Several have stayed for longer periods to receive instruction which has had the effect of maintaining the freshness and relevance of their knowledge and of re-validating it in terms of a higher authority outside the village. Coupled with this revitalized monastic system at Bodhnath there has been a certain amount of 'missionary' activity under the leadership of Tulku Orgyan, a well-known Nying-ma-pa lama from Kham who has provided funds for the restoration of dilapidated gompas and sent disciples to become their incumbents. Unlike Tamang lamas these men are generally celibate and work as full-time specialists with no agricultural duties. They participate in Tamang rituals and depend largely on the charity of local villagers to survive. Although careful not to interfere in any way with the indigenous religious system their presence offers a certain threat to the autonomy of Tamang lamas and also provides a model of a more elevated standard of behaviour than is customary among the latter.

It is the non-Tamang tulkus who stand at the head of the Buddhist hierarchy but although all of them are worthy of veneration as the living embodiments of divinity only a few tulkus enter directly into Tamang consciousness. The Dalai Lama, for instance, is of supreme importance to the Tibetan refugees of the area; for them he is both spiritual and temporal leader, the head of the Gelug-pa order and an incarnation of Chenrezi but he is of less significance to the Tamangs who regard the King of Nepal as their temporal leader and who in any case do not follow the reformed Gelug-pa sect. Even the head of the Nying-ma-pa order, Dudjom Rinpoche, is accorded less significance than Tulku Orgyan. The village lamas also look to the spiritual head of the Karma-pa lineage as an important leader, despite the fact that they themselves practise Nying-ma-pa rites. This they claim is because their own ancestor was a Karma-pa priest who founded the Karma-pa clan from which they are nearly all drawn. This may have come about as Snellgrove has suggested (1971: 78) because it was the orders of the Sa-skya-pa and the Karma-pa who were primarily responsible for converting many parts of the high Himalayan region to Buddhism and who had great influence there. One of these may indeed have settled in the vicinity of Syabru.(4) On the other hand it may be some sort of post hoc rationalization whose purpose is now obscure, for it is by no means the case that all members of the Karmapa clan are lamas.

Within the village there are two routes to becoming a lama: by birth as the son of a lama, and by training after the discovery of a vocation. There are very few of the vocational or parhi (5) lamas for there are many obstacles to surmount before final recognition is achieved. There is active competition from the more numerous hereditary lamas so that the vocational recruit may have difficulty in finding employment. Moreover there are the problems involved in finding and paying a teacher, sparing sufficient time to study and having the financial means or family support to withdraw periodically from secular life. Most who embark on such a course end up as what may be called lay readers; they have mastered the Tibetan script and learned to read the texts, have enough musical sense to play the instruments during rituals and can assist with technical operations such as the making of tormas or printing prayer-flags. However, they have not undertaken retreats. Such men do not enjoy the same sort of respect given to lamas or receive any payment for their assistance at rituals but nevertheless earn merit from their contribution to religion

in addition to being associated with the prestigious sub-culture of religious specialists.

Of the ten lamas of Syabru only one is of the parhi type, all the others being thari or hereditary lamas. The latter are able to trace their lineage back through at least five or six generations to the founder of a particular gumpa (i.e. Mang-zhe). The position of konyer (Tib. dkon-gnyer) or sacristan is vested in the head of the lineage and passes from father to eldest son. The duties of the sacristan revolve around the upkeep of the gumpa and the observance of the calendrical rituals; associated tasks include performing the daily renewal of the altar offerings, maintenance of the fabric of the gumpa including the decoration of the statues and wall paintings, the preparation of the altar for particular ceremonies and the leading of religious ceremonies. Lineage fission has led to the appearance of several sub-lineages which no longer have a direct interest in the sacristan-ship of the gumpa and have lost their rights in a share of the annual charity offerings of the laity (see below), although they continue to participate in the ceremonies.

The system of village-based priests acting as ritual specialists in the employ of the lay people has several features in common with the ser-ky'im dr'a-pa of Dingri in Tibet, described by Aziz (1978; Ch 4). There are, however, important differences to be noted between the two variants. The Tibetan ser-ky'im are segregated into separate religious communities which have ritual links with one or more lay hamlets from whom they also recruit members. Although some villages in the Langtang region suggest this pattern (for example, the service rendered by Mang-zhe Gumpa to Syabru) it is by no means universal and many Tamang lamas reside among the laity. Moreover, ser-ky'im unlike Tamang lamas are said to have no special high status or inherited power.

Although only hereditary and vocational lamas are found within the village the full structure of the priesthood must, as I have indicated, be viewed in a wider context. To these two types can then be added the reincarnate tulku lamas whose power is wholly innate and the magician-lamas (Tib. sngag-pa) who have the ability to use their powers for non-Buddhist ends, such as harming enemies. Thus as with the shamans a theoretical construct can be drawn up which locates the various types of lamas in terms of two axes: innate versus acquired power

and moral versus amoral or morally suspect attitude. Once again the most common type of village practitioner is located at the ambiguous point where the axes intersect. His power is not wholly innate like that of the tulku but it has nevertheless an hereditary or inborn element, while his moral standing lies somewhere between that of the celibate full-time monk and the magician-priest working for the personal gain of a client with somewhat questionable moral standards. The implications of these distinctions will be further drawn out below.

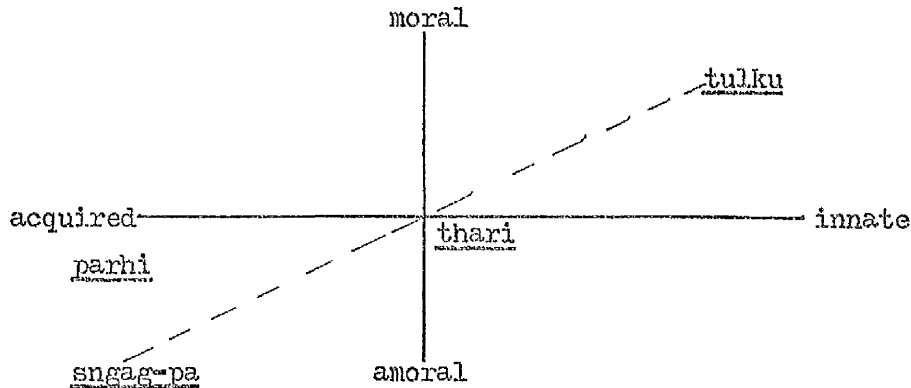


Fig 13 - Classification of lamas

Thus the parallelism which exists between the two groups of specialists is not between the specific types - there are no reincarnate shamans, while all lamas must undergo instruction unlike some shamans. It is a question of an underlying parallel in terms of sets of structured perceptions about the qualities appertaining to religious specialists in which the most significant distinctions are the various routes to the achievement of religious power and the moral attitude which informs its use. From these spring the classificatory systems applied to both lamas and shamans.

The lama's training

All sons of lamas are automatically candidates for the priesthood and the general expectation is that this is what they will become. However, this is only possible if they receive the proper training and undergo the initiation of a retreat; the mere fact of birth is not sufficient entitlement to the status on its own and any pretensions to such by someone not properly instructed and initiated would be regarded as ludicrous by his fellows.

Training begins when the boy is six or seven years old. At first he is simply under the direction of his father or elder brothers and

is taught the Tibetan alphabet and script, attends rituals and masters simple chants. The acquisition of literacy in Tibetan is one of the most essential prerequisites of the priests, for their ritual performances depend on an ability to read the texts. Literacy and religion are so closely tied together in most minds that people find it difficult to conceive of any other reason for acquiring the skill; very few people, other than one or two ex-Gurkhas, are literate in Nepali, the language of all commercial dealings, and most show little enthusiasm for having their children schooled in Nepali. As the aspiring pupil progresses he will be placed under the direction of a teacher (lopen; Tib. slob-dpon), most often the sacristan of Mang-zhe Gompa, and will learn to read the texts and to assist in preparing altars and playing musical instruments. By his teens he will already be referred to as 'lama' although this is by way of a courtesy title at this stage.

His education up to this point has in fact been no more than a preliminary to becoming a fully-fledged lama which depends crucially on spending a period in retreat. So at this point the young man has a certain amount of choice in the course of his future. He can either let it be known that he does intend to undertake a period of solitary contemplation or, if he finds himself temperamentally unsuited to the life or the intellectual strain too demanding or has other ambitions, he can gradually play less and less part in ceremonial affairs and pursue more worldly goals. One young man, when asked why he had not continued with his career, replied that the main trouble was women - they were not prepared to do the extra work of the household while one went on retreats and pilgrimages and so forth. His wife, who overheard, quickly interjected that he was merely trying to find excuses for his own stupidity and lack of initiative. While this may have been true in his case the answer did pinpoint one of the prime difficulties facing the aspiring lama, that of reconciling life as a householder and the demands of a family with his religious duties. Inevitably, time spent on religion involves harder work for the wife and results in reduced production which may not be balanced for many years by the rather slender income derived from the practice of religion.

The retreat or tsam (Tib. mtshams) is one of the most difficult and demanding parts of the lama's training and in recognition of this his power and piety will be seen as directly related to the length of time which he has completed. Amongst Tibetan lamas it is not uncommon for this to be a period of three years, three months and three days,

but no village lama aspires to complete more than seven months tsam and not all manage this much, four or five months being quite usual. Although best completed all in one piece it is also possible and quite common to undertake shorter periods and total them up.

Tsam has the sense both of an intermediate or interstitial space and of a protected space marked off from its surroundings. This describes the essence of the retreat in both a physical and a social sense. Physically it takes place in a hut or temporary shelter much like a cattle goth which is erected some distance away from other habitations at a place selected by one's teacher, often in the vicinity of his gampa. This physically demarcated space is then religiously sanctified and set apart. The novice protects himself by setting up at each of the four corners the tormas of the Guardians of the Four Directions whom he calls upon to watch over him and keep evil spirits away. Social separation is also used to isolate the young lama and emphasise the initiatory quality of his retreat. He is obliged to cut himself off from all human contact for the allotted period, seeing and talking to no-one and maintaining an attitude of piety and concentration without even momentary distractions such as gazing at the scenery. All normal roles are in suspension - work is forbidden, as is the preparation of food which must be left for him by his teacher or by a member of his family. The novice is temporarily suspended in the liminal state which characterises all transitions from one status to another, until such time as he emerges as a fully accomplished lama. During this period he is concerned with the ritual service of the chief Buddhist deities and with rendering himself a fit vessel to appropriate their power during the rituals he will subsequently conduct: power must first be mastered before it can be used -

"It is only after one has done the ritual service that one may employ the deity, evoking his functions of pacifying, increasing or destroying....."

(Tsongk'apa, quoted in Beyer, op. cit.: 37).

The ritual service of the tsam involves periods of concentrated meditation and worship during which the novice constructs the appropriate torma and practises the visualization of each particular deity, meditates upon his qualities, reads the texts appropriate to him and recites the specific mantra associated with him up to 100,000 times daily. During a typical five month retreat the time may be structured in this way:

ritual service of Guru Rinpoche	--	one month, one week
ritual service of Opame	--	one month
ritual service of Chenrezi	--	one month
ritual service of Guru Dragpo	--	eight days
ritual service of Kando	--	eight days
ritual service of the Guardians of the Four Directions	--	eight days each
the obtaining of life (<u>tse tup</u>)	--	eight days

The periods of time allotted give an incidental view of the importance which is attached to the various deities. Guru Rinpoche's power is the most comprehensive and the most frequently evoked in rituals; a correspondingly longer period must be spent on his ritual service. He stands in the same direct line as the Buddha Opame and the bodhisattva Chenrezi who receive almost the same amount of attention, while the supporting figures of Guru Dragpo and Kando have their ritual service completed in only eight days.

Once he has completed the retreat the initiand is now regarded as a fully qualified lama able to conduct both public and private rituals. There is no further initiation or appointment by higher authority, or requirement to follow comprehensive rules of conduct such as apply to monastic orders. He ought of course to abide by the Buddhist injunctions against killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying and drunkenness - as indeed should laymen - but equally, if he fails to do so, there is no authority empowered to remove or 'defrock' him. The hierarchy which he has entered does not extend to temporal control but depends on acceptance of his fitness by the community in which he serves. In cases of gross impropriety his religious power may be regarded as 'spoiled' and people cease to employ him, or out of shame he may discontinue practising; but in cases of minor misconduct a lama of some learning and personal influence can maintain his position despite lapses such as quarrelling and drunkenness with no more than a small loss of prestige.

Lamas and laymen

The period spent in retreat is not only a qualification for the role of lama but an essential way of making a clear demarcation between the special expertise and status of the lama and that of the layman who does not undertake tsam. Maintaining this distinction presents the lamas with a considerable problem for, unlike a monastic community

which can practise virtual withdrawal from lay life and inculcate asceticism in its members, the lamas are continually thrown together with fellow villagers; moreover, they must perform the same tasks as lay villagers, involving themselves in social and family life. They live as married householders and do not earn enough from religion to avoid agricultural work.

The potential and actual contradictions that can arise between the world renouncing ideal and the involvement of the priesthood in social affairs have been thoroughly explored by students of Hinduism and Theravada Buddhism (for recent reassessments see Parry, 1980 and Carrithers, 1979). But the problem which the hereditary Tamang lama faces is rather different. His order, the Nyingma-pa, permits worldly involvement by the priesthood (and because of this historically lost a certain amount of prestige with the advent of the reformist Gelug-pa sect), so that there is no direct conflict with sectarian tenets. However, since in order to maintain the lineage he is inevitably involved in family life and family life necessarily involves agricultural work, there is seemingly nothing which marks out his role as any different from that of a learned lay reader or that entitles him to special religious authority.

In sum it is very difficult to live exactly as other men but nevertheless to claim special powers in relation to the supernatural. A similar problem confronts the Bare, the Buddhist priests of the Newars of Kathmandu Valley. As Greenwold has shown (1974; 1978), their solution has been to retain the symbolic trappings of Buddhist renunciation while entirely rejecting the actuality. The Tamang response goes beyond mere symbolic trappings for it really does involve withdrawal from the world, but only on a temporary basis and as a preparation for a return to the social world. The retreat is a period of total removal from and rejection of lay life during which the lama lives as a hermit or monk, neither working for a living nor engaging in social intercourse, after which he returns to the world of the village spiritually empowered and socially transformed. Although the main purpose of the retreat has been the acquisition of the power to evoke the gods, it is conducted in the idiom of renunciation and asceticism, an ethic which is 'higher' than that of the acquisition of power or knowledge for more instrumental purposes and a path which is regarded as beyond the capability of the average layman.

This temporary adoption of the role of the ascetic has an ironic counterpart in the local attitude towards genuine wandering ascetics, or dzogt as the Tamangs call them, who most closely approach the early Buddhist ideal of the bhiksu or mendicant monk. They are used as a sort of bogeyman to frighten recalcitrant children and as a figure of fun, as in the Yum festival where the dzogt figure, alternately frightening and ridiculous, is actually played by a lama. Villagers' - and lamas' - feelings about renunciation are thus rather ambivalent. On the one hand time spent in retreat freed from worldly ties is undoubtedly the sign of and the means towards achieving great piety. Numerous stories of the great sages such as Milarepa emphasise and laud this withdrawal from the world which is not just a purely selfish search for enlightenment but will ultimately bring benefit to all beings through the practitioner's bodhisattva vow. On the other hand, the village lama is not like a monk for he is only of benefit to the community in an immediate sense by ministering to their ritual needs, not by withdrawal. He lives in the village rather as a fallen monk would do who has not been able to maintain his vows, engaged in sexual, social and commercial transactions but at the same time he lays claim to superior status and treatment vis-à-vis the laity.

The high status of the lama who has completed his tsam is indicated by the considerable deference with which he is treated by lay people. It is seen in the asymmetrical terms of address which are used and the employment of special honorific language. Lamas are called by the respectful terms of address which are appropriate to a man of a generation one senior to that which they in fact occupy. Thus a man of his own generation will call him ashang or mother's brother, while a man junior to him will call him me-me or mother's father. Special honorific forms are used in the imperative mood for a number of common expressions such as go! (phep-go instead of ni-u), come! (phem nang-go instead of ha-u), drink! (che nam-go instead of tun-go), eat! (sol che nam-go instead of ken cha-u) and so on.

Respect is shown in various other ways. Invariably when a lama enters a lay house he is shown to the best seat on the bed below the window, so that he sits above ordinary men, and a considerable show of hospitality is made - special rugs to sit on are produced, food and

drink is provided in the best utensils etc. People refrain from smoking in their presence for this is regarded as particularly polluting (it is said that tobacco grew from the place where a woman's menstrual blood fell on the ground and is hence polluting to god and his servants, the lamas); this is the only one of the minor prohibitions which is unswervingly observed by every lama, although some also abstain from distilled liquor. People come to the lamas to receive blessings (chü-wang), first removing their hat and knife and then touching foreheads with him. Alternatively one of the holy books may be applied to their heads or a pat of butter placed on the crown of the head at the same time as a mantra is spoken. The lama, like the book, is a vessel (ten) of power (wang) which can be communicated directly to the supplicant; hence the necessity for him to maintain his own purity by avoiding pollution.

A complex system of status ranking is used by the lama themselves and made visible on the occasion of every major festival in the seating arrangements. No single criterion is used but rather a combination based on seniority, lineage, time passed in retreat, and personal qualities such as age, piety and knowledge. Thus at a temple ceremony the sacristan of that gumpa always sits nearest the altar. Next may come the head of the Karmapa lineage, then his younger brother, then senior members of the sub-lineages, then their sons. Things become more complicated on occasions which call for cooperation between the Tamang lamas and their Tibetan counterparts. Thus it is not clear if the incumbent of Gompagang who is celibate and learned, if personally unassuming, ranks above the head of the local Karmapa lineage and before anyone sits down there may be a long-drawn-out but good-natured battle with each trying to usher the other into the topmost place. There are fewer doubts concerning another Tibetan resident of Gompagang, a magician-priest, on the rare occasions he visits (for he conducts only private ceremonies and does not join in calendrical and other public rites). He is a man of such extraordinary personal presence and reputed magical powers to control the weather, the wild animals of the forest and so on, that he is regarded with a mixture of awe and fear by everyone, and automatically given pride of place. He is known by the most elaborate of all respectful terms - kusho (Tib. sku-3habs) or 'the feet of the great man'.

The Buddhist layman - and this means everyone bar the lamas, for Buddhism is an automatic function of birth in the community - owes a number of religious duties to his kinsmen, to the community at large and to the lamas. Although there is scope to exceed the minimum and thereby earn additional merit, to neglect entirely these obligations would be tantamount to a rejection of the community itself and could only be followed by social isolation or even emigration. As has been seen, the layman's duties revolve almost entirely around the giving of food and drink through the sponsoring of communal festivals, in addition to performing the death ceremonies of one's patrilineal kin. Here attention is focused on the layman's duty to feed the lamas.

From the earliest times Buddhism always insisted that the ideal of the monk was the wandering ascetic who depended for his support on charitable donations of food by householders; conversely such donations came to be viewed as one of the prime methods by which the lay person could earn merit and to this day in many Theravada Buddhist countries householders do donate food on an almost daily basis to their monks. The same ethic of giving permeates Tamang Buddhism, although in an attenuated form. Laymen make gifts of butter to be burnt in lamps before the altar, of money for the purchase of butter or for the raising of a new prayer-flag, and of labour for the improvement of gumpa buildings. But especially they make gifts of food to the lamas, despite the fact that they are not only not homeless ascetics but in fact have their own independent means of support. Every ceremony, whether public or private, is prefaced by a lavish meal offered to all the officiants and paid for by the sponsors. Rather than the flour mush or boiled potatoes which constitute everyday fare, this is almost always high quality white rice heaped as high as it will go on a brass platter, together with a hot sauce of vegetables and often meat. Tibetan tea and rice beer also accompany the meal. If the ceremony is a long one the lamas may be fed several more times at the expense of the sponsors; this is in addition to the monetary remuneration of Rs 5 per day which each also receives. A useful 'perk' from the lamas' point of view, this feeding parallels in lay eyes the food offerings which are presented to the gods to induce them to attend the ceremony. However, more than simply an inducement the food earns merit (sonam) for the donor. It is surely not coincidental that the

expressions for 'merit' (bsod-nams) and 'alms of cooked food' (bsod-snyoms) are closely related in Tibetan.

The classical idea of the layman's duty to feed the mendicant monk resurfaces in the custom of the annual begging round which several of the lamas undertake in November (in the tenth month of the Tibetan calendar). This is known as their mehto, literally 'flower', but signifying here an offering to a religious personage; it is the Tibetan expression me-tog which is used, not the Tamang word for a flower which is mendo. Four lamas undertake the collection, assisted by three or four villagers who act as helpers. They begin at the bottom of the village and work their way up. At each household an impromptu altar of a stool or piece of wood has been set out on the courtyard; in its centre is placed a small bottle of spirits (about $\frac{1}{4}$ litre), its lip anointed with butter and on either side is placed a plateful of grain - wheat, maize, millet, whatever the household has in plentiful supply; a little juniper incense may also be burnt. While the helpers decant the grain into sacks the lamas are offered a little of the alcohol which they drink out of their cupped palms. They scatter a few grains and recite a brief blessing before moving on.

The amounts given tend to vary with the quality of the harvest and the benefits which the lamas are thought to bring. It is not entirely clear by what principle entitlement to mehto is established, but it seems to include the heads of each sub-lineage of lamas, together with the incumbent of Gompagang - four lamas in all. Not even the sons of these men, themselves lamas, are exempted from giving their share. When every household has been visited the lamas return with their sacks of grain to the house of one of them where it is carefully measured and shared out. In 1977 the offerings were not very impressive:

wheat	-	3 <u>pāthis</u> , one <u>māna</u>
millet	-	4 <u>pāthis</u>
maize	-	9 <u>pāthis</u>
<u>kharu</u>	-	3 <u>pāthis</u> , 4 <u>māna</u>
millet and maize mixed	-	12 <u>pāthis</u> , 2 <u>māna</u>

Thus just short of 32 pāthi or rather over 100 kgs. had to be divided four ways, giving sufficient to feed each man for about one month. (6) The lamas grumbled about this amount but since it was a year of poor harvest they could not complain overmuch and indeed it seemed that they rarely received much more than 30 pāthis between them.

An interesting sidelight on villagers' attitudes to their lamas was provided by the visit two days later by the Kusho Lama of Gompagang, the magician-priest, who conducted his own mehto through the village. In very little time he single-handedly amassed 65 pathis (nearly 250 kgs.) of grain, or enough to feed himself for about nine months.

Just as the classical idea of retreat from the world by those seeking salvation has been transformed in the Tamang context, so too has the ideal of selfless giving. Old symbolic forms continue to cloak new meanings, lending legitimacy to them. From the timing of the village lamas' mehto it was clear that it had the character of a fee rather than a selfless gift. As anthropologists have often noted, what at first sight seems to be a pure gift turns out to be another example of reciprocity in social relations. Two days prior to the begging round the lamas had completed five days of readings culminating in the protective circumambulation of the village (the Yum festival); the full power of Buddhism had been activated on behalf of the community to seal the village boundaries against incursions by evil spirits; in addition the lamas had worked hard and entertained their fellows with the masked dances. Villagers undoubtedly viewed their contribution to the mehto as a form of fee or religious tax paid to recompense the lamas for the benefits which they had brought to the community. But the vastly greater contribution to the Kusho Lama was not so much a fee as an inducement, for immediately the huge donation had been presented the Kusho Lama was sat down with a group of about 20 heads of household who spent several hours trying to convince him to enact a ceremony which would rid their fields of the wild boar and monkeys which every year destroy a great proportion of the crops. Although there was no doubt that the Kusho Lama could do it and thereby make a tremendous difference to the lives of the villagers, the sticking point appeared to be that it would necessitate the deaths of many living creatures and so would earn a lot of bad karma for the lama and the villagers. It could only be countenanced if they also made donations to the gumpa and held additional readings of the scriptures to atone for the sin of killing.

The picture which begins to emerge, then, is one of reciprocal relations between lamas and laymen in which laymen are prepared to accord high status and material support to their priests in return for their ritual services. The principal problem of the lamas is to retain their position as specialists while at the same time living as

married householders and this they do through manipulating the symbolism of asceticism. One final point may be made concerning the importance of this theme: there is a radical separation maintained between the amount and type of merit which may be made by lamas and laymen. For laymen it is said that the highest religious duty is the performance of nyung-ne (Ch 6) which involves a day of fasting and silence, a tsam in miniature as it were. However, for a lama the greatest merit is earned by the practice of gom (Tib. sgom), literally hibernation but here meaning deep meditation. While the layman is limited to merit through giving and through a temporary imitation of lamahood, the lama reserves to himself the special path of contemplation and mystic union.

Conclusion - lamas and shamans

Returning once more to the questions raised at the beginning of this chapter, it is now clear that it would be difficult to cast the Tamang shaman and lama in the mould of cultural policy-maker and religious technician, or as pragmatic and transcendental specialists. Nor are they divided in terms of an individual and a collective following or on the basis of a part-time or full-time specialization. Each may be responsible for individual cures based on magical exorcistic powers and each is involved in ceremonies with community-wide implications, although admittedly this applies to a lesser extent to the shaman. However, the overlap in functions is too great for a functional analysis to be successful.

From another point of view a number of writers have drawn attention to the way in which shamanic elements have been incorporated within and even 'routinized' by Buddhist orthodoxy, both material equipment (drum, arrow, costume, sacrificial objects), symbolic themes (flight, return from the dead) and personal powers (divination, curing, reincarnation) (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1975; Ch XXVII; Eliade, 1972; Ch XIII; Hoffmann, 1961; Berglie, 1976; Aziz, 1976; Paul, 1976). This is an interesting but predictable concomitant of the coexistence of the two traditions but it does not account for the persistence of shamanism, which one might assume would have been rendered redundant if Buddhism had stolen its clothes. A historical analysis will not account for the present-day relationship of shamanism and lamaism.

One aspect of the linkage between lamas and shamans is pointed up by the two sets of interconnected attributes ascribed to both which I

described - their route to power and their moral attitude - which give rise to certain correspondences in terms of typologies of internal organisation. However, they are sharply contrasted in terms of another set of interrelated attributes - their ethical orientation and their relation to social structure.

I have indicated above how the conceptual organization of each complex may be viewed as the outcome of a double classificatory system based on power and morality. A white shaman ranks above a black one by virtue of morality even though he may be seen as less powerful. A self-sprung shaman is contrasted with one who must be taught the art. Similarly a reincarnate lama contrasts with a vocational lama in terms of one set of attributes (power), a magician-priest with a village lama in terms of another (morality). Obviously the full range of permutations is large but the scheme indicates the broad area of comparison between lamas and shamans.

Black shamans and magician-priests are both practitioners who use their powers unfettered by higher moral principle and both are feared and respected by the laity. It is not the using of magic for destructive ends that is significant here, for even this is permitted if it furthers religion - as the career of Guru Rinpoche, renowned destroyer of demons in the Himalayas, shows; it is that they use it for their own or their clients' personal gain or aggrandizement, in opposition to the wider community. Conversely there is a point of contact between conventional lamas and white shamans in that both conduct themselves with moral probity, in other words employ their power in such a way that while individuals can benefit, the community is upheld. This moral probity is symbolised in the case of the white shamans by a refusal to sacrifice, while in the case of the lamas it is symbolised by the stress on asceticism and supposed renunciation of worldly values. The biography of the Tibetan sage Milarepa illustrates how this moral dichotomy can even be embodied in one man. Milarepa began his career as a magician-priest, using his powers to bring death and destruction to his enemies. Subsequently he repented of the evil karma which he had earned, found himself a new guru (Marpa) and after various trials settled to a life of selfless contemplation and extreme asceticism.

The second area of comparison stems from the way in which power is attained. The reincarnate lama and the self-created shaman stand

at the peak of their respective systems, for both have attained power directly, without human mediation. This direct participation in divinity is the ultimate source of their status and power. Together in the middle rank are found those whose claim to power is based on a hereditary religious linkage which connects them at least indirectly with the divine source - the thari lamas and the rig-dsin or knowledge-holding shamans. And in both systems those who rank lowest are only tangentially linked to the source through the training they have received from specialists of a higher order.

If this were all it would suggest that Buddhism and shamanism co-exist side-by-side for the Tamangs - two parallel systems, sharing a similar organisational structure, offering similar benefits, competing for clients and liberally borrowing from one another their symbolic themes. Which specialist was employed would be a matter of individual choice depending on the results one sought and one's access to the most powerful practitioners. In fact this is not the case; both are employed almost universally on varying occasions, even shamans by lamas and vice versa, because, I suggest, other factors are ultimately more significant. The first of these is an ethical contrast in which Buddhism always ranks higher. Although the shaman is a powerful figure in relation to the supernatural his sphere of operation is concerned with only a limited portion of the spirit world. He deals primarily with the territorial gods, the ancestors and his own gurus and familiars, and with the local demons and sprites. These beings are potentially dangerous if displeased or ignored but they are also capricious, inconsistent and open to inducements and subjugation by the shaman's power. However, they have few implications for moral conduct, no eschatological role, no transcendental powers and offer no theodicy of suffering. Their importance is only in the here and now but they have no relevance for the ultimate questions of death and salvation. These beings can be controlled by lamas too, but they remain rather tangential to their main enterprise, whereas for the shaman they are central. He has come by his power through public struggle and victory over these forces and when it comes to dealing with them his place in the totality of the Tamang religious enterprise is assured. But the high Buddhist gods remain altogether outside his orbit no matter how great his powers.

By contrast Buddhism and the lamas are guaranteed a higher ethical evaluation because the principal way in which laymen can accrue merit is through giving to the priesthood and for the benefit of religion. And merit is essential if one is to die a satisfactory death and attain an afterlife in heaven. The dominant ideology ranks death as the supreme event in a man's life and the lama, as mediator between this life and the next, has a supreme importance as the conduit of merit, the intercessor with the gods and the officiant at the death rites.

This involvement in merit making and the death rites underpins another crucial distinction between lamas and shamans. It inevitably means that the former are closely identified with the social structure itself; through the death rites (examined below in Chapter 8) they effect its most crucial transformations. Moreover, their prestige, their piety, their learning (in principle) are the embodiment of those values which are held supreme. The shaman is no less important but he occupies a more ambivalent position. He deals with chaos, disorder, impurity and demonic forces and confronts them on their own terms, not by bringing to bear a superior value system. While this gives him an essential complementary role to that of the priesthood some of the effects of his calling inevitably rub off on him. No one can be quite sure that he is not a black shaman masquerading as white, that rather than straightening out disorder he will not undermine society by a self-serving use of the very forces he purports to command. He is needed but he is also feared for in the end the only power which can restrain him is that of Buddhism.

The relationship between the one and the other is by no means fixed or static; it fluctuates as a result of historical influences, social and economic pressures, external impulses and personal struggles to extend influence. Local changes, as for instance the gradual eclipse of the tribal specialist, are often associated with a continuous and protracted struggle to redraw spheres of influence using long-established and respected symbolic forms to achieve success. It may be surmised that a similar process has gone on since Buddhism first came to the Himalayas.

Such competition between lamas and shamans has been channelled into a variety of legends which emphasise the ethical superiority of the lama, the energy and cunning of the shaman and so on. The superiority of the passive contemplative life over the wild uncontrolled outbursts of the shamans is neatly epitomised in a story well-known for at least 800 years throughout the Tibetan culture area but told in Syabru with the locations shifted from far-away Mount Kailāsa to the local landscape (7). The story takes on additional meaning from the triumph of the lama at the site traditionally associated with the shaman; -

"One day the lama Tilokpa (sic) and the bombo Naru-bön decided to have a contest to see who could reach the Gosāikund lakes first by dawn the following day. The lama sat down in a pleasant spot and began to meditate quietly in the sun, while the shaman went bounding off up the hill, beating his drum and singing and shouting. The lama sat meditating so long that eventually his assistant, becoming worried, plucked nervously at his sleeve and asked if it wasn't time they were going. But the lama replied, 'There's nothing to worry about' and returned to his meditations. A while later the shaman passed the halfway point and, jubilant at the prospect of his assured victory, began boasting and crowing. By now thoroughly agitated, the lama's servant once more disturbed his master's thoughts and asked again if they shouldn't be going. The lama replied as before and went back to his meditations. The shaman was now on the verge of reaching Gosāikund but the prospect of victory had made him overconfident and in his wild dancing he stumbled and fell over a precipice. As the sun rose the lama levitated in an instant to the summit and became the victor." (8)

The shaman's reply to this putdown is found in the story of the beyul or 'hidden country' of Langtang which it was believed that Guru Rinpoche had set aside for the use of the faithful at the end of the present world-age. It was first discovered and subsequently populated by Me-me Bengyap Ruta who stumbled across it while in pursuit of his ox. And Me-me Bengyap was of course one of the ancestor-shamans and the direct spiritual descendant of Naro-bön himself, who thus had his revenge in a sense.

The process of extending boundaries and increasing status is not confined to the swapping of folk-tales. The lamas in particular are well-placed to use their position to secure other advantages. It has already been seen how they are gradually taking over the clan-god ceremonies and placing them within a Buddhist framework. At the same time they have set about further raising their status through the attempt to discover a tulku or reincarnation amongst their own ranks, thereby strengthening the claim to leadership of the principal lineage and elevating its spiritual status. It is now being said - particularly by other lamas - that the most promising of the young lamas who is likely to rise to the top of the hierarchy eventually, becoming the incumbent of Mang-zhe Gompa, is in fact the reincarnation of his great-great grandfather, founder of the gompa and the lineage. Evidence for this assertion is adduced from the fact that when he was a child he used to refer to his own grandfather as 'grandson' and to demand insistently that he be taken to his own gompa and given his own things; these of course are the very signs which an infant reincarnation ought to exhibit. But the process of raising him to this special status is so little advanced that it is impossible to tell how it will turn out. At the moment village opinion is divided as to the validity of the claim (which he himself is careful not to make openly); the more simple-minded and trusting are prepared to follow whatever lead their priests provide while the sceptical, and those who have no wish to see the lamas further improve their position, ridicule the claim as a transparent fraud (9).

One of the most significant ways in which the shamans protect their own special position is through a radical rejection of lamaist ministrations at the time of their own death. Since it is at death that the full panoply of Buddhist ritual power and cosmological theory is brought into action, the time when it claims to be of crucial importance to every individual, this is indeed a powerful demarcation of the shamans as different from their fellow men. At the time of death the shamans believe that their soul (sem) goes directly to join the ranks of the Knowledge-holders (rig-dsin dal) in their own special heaven, and not to a Buddhist heaven or hell. In a complete parody of Buddhist rites (at which lamas gather to instruct the soul on the correct path to heaven or rebirth) the shamans of the locality assemble at the place of death of one of their number to instruct their dead comrade to remember that he is still a lombo and to encourage him to go directly to the heaven

of the Knowledge-holders without succumbing to the distractions on the way or falling prey to enemies. They are joined by the taruni, the teenagers, who sing again the bombo songs of the Gosāikund pilgrimage and the kurim ceremony and help to build the pyre and convey the body to the flames (10).

In the shamans' attempt to escape the net of orthodoxy to the very last one sees that they are the genuine proponents of an alternative ideology. The rejection of the Buddhist death ceremony is an indication that the Tamang shaman is no minor healer subservient to the lamas at times of crisis in his own life, but that his route to knowledge and power and his techniques of combatting the ills of this world are backed by his own understanding of the significance of death.

Notes to Chapter 7

(1) Interestingly, the Tibetans, who have long known the site, associate it either with a nāg watersprite known variously as the 'supine nāg' (klu gan-rkyal) or the 'outcast nāg' (klu dol-pa), or with Phags-pa Thugs-rje Chen-po (Arya-Avalokiteśvara), of whom Siva is said to be an aspect (Wylie, 1970: 26-9).

(2) Additionally the Gosāikund pilgrimage illustrates the way in which a single site can have quite different mythological connotations for different cultural groups, a phenomenon which Bharati (1978) has drawn attention to in other parts of the Himalayas.

(3) Presumably Brag-dkar rTa-so near Kyirong, a site associated with Milarepa. Aris has revealed evidence collected at rNal-'byor Phug concerning the entire monastic records of this monastery which illustrate among other things the claims of Nepal to Kyirong and the special protection extended by Jang Bahadur to Brag-dkar (Aris, 1975: 80).

(4) As did a number in Helambu - see Clark, 1980b: 9.

(5) Cf Nepali padhne - 'reading'.

(6) Although it was said that one man ate about ten pāthi of grain per month this would seem a very generous allowance, a more likely figure being 7 pāthi. Or, to look at it another way, Caplan estimates that an adult eats a māna of grain at each of the two daily meals (1970: 206). Macfarlane found that in Thak, although this was the ideal, actual consumption was nearer $1\frac{1}{2}$ māna per day (1976: 164)

(7) Das (1881) offers a translation of the original story from a woodblock print in which of course it is Milarepa and Naro bon chung who disputed for the possession of Mount Kailāsa. Paul (1976: 148) records an almost identical Sherpa version of the story set in Solu-Khumbu.

(8) No doubt the symbolic significance of the contest goes deeper; the symbolism of the ascent suggests the journey to heaven and the superiority of the lama's route over the shaman's.

(9) A similar process of finding reincarnations seems to be already well-established among the Sherpas of Khumbu, according to one of their ethnographers (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1964: 155ff).

(10) It was not possible to observe this ceremony but informants indicated that subsequently the lamas too had an opportunity to undertake readings for his soul.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FULL CIRCLE: THE CYCLE OF DEATH RITUALS

The series of rituals which surrounds the process of death is the most costly, elaborate and important of any that are undertaken in Tamang society. It could be said that dying is the most significant event in a man's life; it not only effects permanent and far-reaching changes in social relationships, but to a large extent determines the fate of the soul - whether it is reincarnated again into the round of existence or manages to reach the heaven of the high gods. Correct actions and a right attitude of mind on the part of the deceased and of his kinsmen and the religious specialists are vital if this goal is to be achieved and if his spirit is not to linger in the vicinity, still attached to its old habits and causing trouble for the survivors. All of the three main ritual modes which have been distinguished - protection, offering and exorcism - are represented in the different ceremonies which involve the cooperation of both major types of specialists, lamas and shamans. In the course of the rituals a whole range of social relationships are summarized, reaffirmed or redefined and differential responses will be required of agnatic and affinal kinsmen, men and women, co-villagers and people of other villages.

The death rituals fall into a typically Buddhist pattern and are remarkably orthodox, bearing comparison with those of the Tibetans (Waddell, op. cit.: 488 ff; David-Neel, 1931: 29 ff; Evans-Wentz, 1960 (1921)), and very similar except in differences of detail to those of the Sherpas (von Fürer-Haimendorf, 1964: 224 ff; Ortner, op. cit.: Ch 5) and the Lepchas of Sikkim (Gorer, op. cit.: Ch 13). Those of the Gurungs of Nepal although rather more divergent exhibit a similar structure (Pignède, op. cit.: 271 ff & 340 ff; Messerschmidt, 1976a: 84ff).

Eschatology

In the western world death is popularly conceived of as an abrupt and virtually instantaneous event signalled by irreversible physical changes such as loss of heartbeat, breathing and brain functions which signify the transition from one absolute state (life) to another (death); reappraisal of current scientific knowledge has suggested that the popular attitude is not entirely correct. In any

case medical advances sometimes blur this picture and death becomes largely a question of doctors' decisions.

The Tamang view is quite different. Death is a long-drawn-out process which begins during life when perceptual and cognitive functions are temporarily in suspension in a state not unlike sleep. Then comes a long period in limbo, the intermediate state, characterized by a revival of perception and cognition (though not of course sensation); at first this is accompanied by a state of great spiritual clarity but this gradually decays to be replaced by an increasingly nightmarish and uncontrollable journey by the soul. This period terminates after 49 days with either a re-embodiment of the soul or its arrival in heaven if there has been a correct alignment of karmic forces, human ministrations and divine intervention. During the intermediate period the actions of the mourners and the lamas are of direct benefit to the deceased and they are still able to interact with him in some sense; he too is sensible of their efforts although unable to communicate directly. After the 49 days the relationship between them is severed, except where there has been an incorrect performance of the death rites or their complete omission with the consequence that the dead soul will remain trapped in the intermediate state and in the vicinity of its home as a shinde; barring this the soul will then have moved beyond the range of human intervention (except in special cases such as the reincarnation of saints in known human bodies, or the ancestor shamans who can still be called upon to aid their human protégés).

Death is either natural or untimely; it may be preceded by omens and auguries in which case various steps can be taken to avert it or at least prepare for it. Natural death is the inevitable result of karma in which case nothing can be done to avert it. But hopefully the dying person will have performed a number of nyung-ne and other meritorious acts during his lifetime which will help him on to a better life after death; those who have sufficient prior warning make doubly sure (if they can afford it) by commissioning in addition a mass reading of all the liturgical books (Yum). To hear the whole doctrine prior to death is particularly beneficial as well as earning extra merit by spreading religion; the performance requires seven or eight lamas who read simultaneously (from different books) for up to five days and the cost to feed them and the guests who attend may be in the region of 500 rupees.

Untimely death is always the result of predatory demons trying

to steal away the soul, in which case a rite of the exorcistic type must be performed, either by the shaman or by the lamas (see Ch 5). The attacking demons must be caught, for example in a thread-cross, and expelled after being propitiated by the presentation of a substitute (lut; Tib. glud) for the soul under attack which is thus ransomed back for its rightful owner (see Lessing, 1951). Here there seems to be a confusing synonymity of terms between the sem and the nam-she of the dead person. The sem, the mind or personality, is usually the prey of demons while in Buddhist thought it is the nam-she, consciousness principle or residuum of the cognitive and perceptual functions, which transmigrates to heaven, or rebirth, or achieves enlightenment. During the funeral rites it is with the nam-she that the lamas concern themselves.

The funeral rites

Three major acts in the death rituals may be distinguished: the first surrounding the actual death and subsequent funeral; the second comprising the rites during the intermediate period; and the third revolving around the gyewa (Tib. dge-ba) or concluding feast. These acts themselves subdivide into numerous scenes which are described sequentially below and then analysed as a whole. It will be noted that the three acts correspond to van Gennep's three movements in rites of passage: separation, margin and incorporation. There is here a perfect fit between the social process and the religious ideology which itself marks each phase with specific rites: first the removal from human society, then the liminal or intermediate state when the deceased is betwixt and between life and death, human society and the afterlife, and finally the incorporation into a radically new status, that of an ancestor in heaven.

When death can no longer be averted the first stage is set in motion by the lighting of a butter lamp on the household altar at the moment, as near as possible, of the expiration of the dying person. Then the lopen, the senior lama, must be alerted for no preparations can be undertaken without his authority. At the same time messengers must be sent to tell other members of the dead person's family that the death has occurred, in particular in the case of a man his daughters and their husbands - who may of course be resident in other neighbouring villages - for these wife-taking affines (mā) have a special role to play in the funeral ceremonies. A death will thus very often involve the participation of some of the inhabitants of two or more

surrounding villages. In the case of the impending death of a woman who has married outside her natal village her affines may carry her back to her birthplace so that her agnates can more easily perform their part in the ceremony. The wife-takers or classificatory sons-in-law i.e. those of a generation junior to that of the deceased are the only ones who should handle and prepare the corpse, a duty forbidden either to women or to the agnatic relatives.

The body is undressed, but not bathed, and then wrapped in a white funeral shroud; then it is placed in a sitting position with the knees drawn up to the chest to the right (facing) of a temporary altar which the lamas are meanwhile preparing inside the house. The senior lama arrives and carries out the tsi divination (Tib. rtsis) to determine when and where the body should be disposed of. Von Fftrer-Haimendorf describes the operation of the tsi amongst the Sherpas (1964: 226-7); the Tamang practice is comparable. Cremation is almost always the indicated method of disposal and although amongst the Sherpas there is a delay of at least three and sometimes up to six days before it is carried out (ibid.:229), with the Tamangs it usually takes place on the same day or the day after death. Where there is a slightly longer delay the opportunity may be taken to prepare a more elaborate altar with hanging thankas and hundreds of burning butter lamps. While the lamas read and pray the weeping womenfolk of the house, helped by friends and neighbours, prepare a meal for the mourners and the lamas; a portion is set before the corpse so that it may taste the 'smoke' (essence) of it. The corpse at this stage is known as pungbo (Tib. phung-po), meaning a bundle of parts - its constituent elements, mind, consciousness, karmic residue - parts which are no longer animated by the action of the breath (bu) and which will shortly be dispersed by the funeral.

Daughters from outlying villages arrive and throw themselves weeping before the corpse. Meanwhile other villagers begin to assemble, the women all bearing bottles or jars of alcohol to give as an offering of sympathy known as sem-so (1.) to the bereaved. Having made these gifts the mourners wait quietly in the courtyard of the house, men and women now as at all other stages of the death rites sitting separately.

The preparations go ahead. A bier (dom-shing) is constructed out of an iron cooking-pot placed on a wooden base and supported by long poles. The lamas complete the reading of a scripture directed to

Thuji Chenpo and then the mā affines arrange the corpse on the bier in an upright foetal position and cover the whole structure with brightly coloured silk cloths. On the corpse's head they place a lama's hat of the ri-nga (Tib. rigs-nga) type - that is, with five sides each depicting one of the celestial Buddhas; a spray of young bamboos with strips of coloured cloth attached is arranged over the corpse to form a canopy. While these arrangements are being made another group of men stand around the corpse holding up blankets, so that none of the womenfolk should inadvertently catch a glimpse of the uncovered body.

The lam-din (cf Tib. lam-'dren - 'guide'), a long strip of white cloth, is attached to the front of the bier and, when all is ready, the senior lama, holding the way-cloth and a dorje sceptre in his right hand and a handbell in his left, leads the corpse carried on its bier by the mā affines through the front door of the house and down the steps, which are covered by a blanket. As the body is taken out the women wail and cry out "ama, ama" (mother!) or "aba, aba" (father!) as appropriate. There is a general absence of symbols of reversal, a common feature of funerals worldwide. The back-door of the house is not used, nor are garments reversed or household objects upturned.

Another group of male mourners have meanwhile assembled as many thanka paintings of high deities as they can and these are held aloft on poles. These men go in the van of the procession to the cremation ground, followed by lamas playing the musical instruments, and then by the senior lama holding the way-cloth and ringing his bell, the idea being that the dead man is reluctant to leave his home and must be 'shown the way', led both physically to the cremation site and symbolically to his meeting with the gods. The chief lama frequently glances back, as if to reassure the corpse and beckon it onwards.

Behind the bier walk the agnatic kinsmen, then other male mourners, then female mourners - a procession of 50 to 100 people. Children never attend funerals, while women do not attend the funerals of children - evidently through a fear of the contagious effects of death; children are thought to be particularly vulnerable, a not unreasonable suspicion in view of the very high infant mortality rates, and this is one of the rare occasions when they are excluded from ceremonial life. (Contrast with a Sherpa funeral which is attended by very few people, never women, but sometimes children are

present (ibid: 230).) Apart from these cases funeral rites are largely the same for men and women, rich and poor alike. In the case of married women they are regarded as forming part of the husband's agnatic kin group which will be responsible for hosting the ceremonies; unmarried or widowed women remain the responsibility of kin traced through their father. In the case of rich and poor the differences are of scale rather than content. Even at this stage certain statements are made about the wealth, piety or status of the deceased, as expressed in the richness of the funeral cloths, the number of thankas carried, and the size of the retinue of lamas and of the procession of mourners. A highly respected figure, a lama or a rich man, may have a complement of ten lamas and a hundred mourners, and all the subsequent rites will be on a more lavish scale; for women the procedure is rather less elaborate while for children it is perfunctory indeed - say four lamas, twenty-five (male) mourners and a very brief service. A full gyewa (feast) is not held for a child - there are after all no social obligations to fulfil or roles to redistribute - although it is said that a small party at which rice and milk are served may be held for his age-mates.

The cremation site is always outside the village on high ground in the direction specified by the lama's divination. It usually seems to be towards the south or west of the village, although whether for practical or symbolic reasons could not be stated with certainty. It is noteworthy, however, that the heaven of Opame, Devachen Shingum, is located in the west, and that the west is the place of the dead among several Himalayan peoples, including the Limbus (Caplan, personal communication). The greater the personage the further away it tends to be, with the most exalted being carried for about half-an-hour to the site of the guru bumba, the especially holy receptacle of Guru Rinpoche at Gompagang. Before leaving the village the procession makes three circumambulations of the village gumpa in the usual clockwise direction. All along the path the procession moves to the funereal beat of the big drum and the mournful blasts of the conch-shell horn (dung) blown by the lamas to draw the attention of the gods to the death and direct them to the cremation site.

At the chosen site one group of men prepares a place for the officiating lamas to lay out their ritual equipment and serves them beer or spirits. A second group cuts wood for the pyre (shing sang - 'purifying wood') which is quickly built to a height of five feet or so on a framework of stakes driven into the ground. A third group

cuts young pine trees and arranges them to form a screen between the pyre and the sitting place of the female mourners, so that they will not see the burning body, called at this stage thin (thin kranpa = cremation).

The lamas circumambulate the pyre and the corpse, playing the drums and cymbals, and the distressed kinsmen remove their hats and prostrate themselves three times before the body in the gesture of respect. At this point as Ortnier puts it, "the deceased is virtually a god the treatment of the corpse is one of massive status elevation...." (op. cit.: 107). This is largely true, for the circumambulations and prostrations, the crown and fine clothes, palanquin and canopy are the sort of honours normally accorded only to very high dignitaries, although the analogy of a king might be more appropriate for the corpse itself corresponds to an offering and like the enhancement of the water and grain offerings in the tse-chu ritual to magnificent proportions the humble corpse is given all the trappings of a glorious king. (2) The wife-taking lineage members now remove the corpse from the bier and place it in position on the pyre, still with its canopy and robes.

The ritual observances during the burning of the pyre are brief. They centre on the making of offerings to Me-lha, the Fire God, the lay idea being that whatever is presented now the deceased will receive in heaven - food of every description, clothing, money and so on. The jinsa (cf Tib. sbyin-sreg - 'burnt offering') should number twenty-one things, but if so many cannot be found some are offered more than once. They include two sorts of wood, two sorts of grass, rice, paddy, wheat, soya, maize, millet, buckwheat, mendo, salt, money, bread, biscuits, cloth, leaves and a mixture of flour and milk. As the lamas chant one of their number takes a handful of each item in turn on a plate to the pyre and throws a portion on to the flames, repeating the action seven times over, counting off each offering aloud: "ki be-loh, nyi be-loh, etc".

When the offerings are finished liquor circulates in great quantities among the mourners and the groups of men and women, seated separately, begin to sing the devotional māne songs while the corpse burns. After about two hours, when most of the body has been consumed in the flames and everybody is very drunk, a small piece of bone is removed from the pyre and then everyone leaves the cremation site. On the way back to the village they stop again at a place in open countryside to eat a funeral meal, known as ropsa, provided by the

deceased's kinsmen and cooked by helpers who did not attend the cremation. At the conclusion of the meal a collection is taken of exactly one rupee from everybody present and given to the chief mourner. This, like the earlier gift of alcohol before the funeral, is known as sem-so, a sympathy offering to offset the expenses of the funeral. The names of the donors are carefully recorded (3). In this way members of the community express a common obligation to one another in times of crisis; by joining the procession, helping to build the pyre or cook the ropsa meal, and contributing money they affirm communal bonds which go beyond those of kinship or affinity in acknowledging mutual interdependence. The names of the participants and donors are noted down so that the recipient of this aid may be sure to repay it in kind when one of them has to call on his services.

Before re-entering the village each mourner washes his hands, face and hair in the village stream to remove the death pollution (shiti) brought about by sitting in proximity to the burning corpse. The lamas then return to the house of the deceased and are served more liquor, while the mourners relax and chat. There are few external signs of mourning, except that no work is done that day in the village; people do not alter their dress, appearance or diet. However there should be no singing, dancing or merry-making in the village during the whole of the transitional period, putting rather a damper on those weddings which have already been arranged. Here again one sees the recognition that the loss is one which affects not just the individual family but the whole community. Finally it is said that members of the household where the death occurred - more heavily polluted than others - should not eat or sleep away from home during the succeeding week.

The disposal of the body is by no means the conclusion of the funeral ceremonies, for one of the most important parts cannot begin until after dark. This, in contrast to the cremation which was an offering ceremony, is an exorcistic rite of the same thread-cross type which has been encountered before (see Ch 5); it is concerned with the expulsion of the demons implicated in the death. This ritual has been mentioned only a few times in the literature concerning Sherpa and Sikkimese societies and each account introduces a number of divergences (4); in the Tamang version further novel elements are to be found.

While helpers prepare hundreds of butter lamps and plain tso

tormas, the lamas begin to construct - in the place beside the altar where until recently the corpse has sat - a palanquin with a wooden base and a surround of paper banners painted with red and green designs; over it is stretched a canopy of threads, so that the construction appears to mimic the bier on which the deceased has been carried that morning. On this base is made a large clay figure representing Sandi (Tib. Za 'dre), the devouring demon (5). He is described as "the god who ate up the dead man's life" (N - moreko mānche jyan khāeko deutā) and is said to be an aspect of Mahādeo. He is a ferocious looking figure with jutting teeth, glaring eyes and hanging moustaches, making him look rather like a pantomime version of a wicked Chinaman. At his feet is the clay figure of a tiger called simply Bāgh (N = tiger) who also has great fangs and is said to like food very much; he holds an egg between his front paws (6). A third torma of the magic weapon type known as Zor is also made; this is said to act like a door-keeper, preventing the return of the death demon.

During the first part of the ritual the lamas summon the fierce patron deities and, through the medium of the shaman who is also present, make the gyek offerings to the hindering demons. The Zor torma is empowered and the demons summoned to their effigies. The palanquin is then moved to the floor by the shaman and placed in front of the lamas. While the shaman then lays out a trail of water leading from the palanquin to the door, one of the lamas places seven offerings around the figure of Sandi, including food, money and cloth representing clothes; the food is mostly of the strong type - meat, onions, garlic and radish. Lastly a model of a bow and arrow (miā-pāli) in miniature is added to the offerings.

Suddenly utter pandemonium breaks out. People begin hurling handfuls of earth around the room, men grab burning brands from the fire and rush here and there applying the flames to every corner, and to the clashing of cymbals and the beating of the drum a lama beats the room with long branches. While this is going on the shaman, accompanied by a group of ten or so chanting and clapping men, carries the thread-cross construction out of the house and away into the fields where it is set down and left; it is not burnt as in some other types of exorcism.

The expulsion of the death demon presents a number of interesting features. To begin with, it places a rather unorthodox slant on the death by ascribing it to a demon (or god), even though doctrinally the death should be fully accounted for by the action of karma. Here it seems that death is always regarded as unnatural, or at least externally caused, karma functioning only as a predisposition, but the proximate cause always being ascribed to a malignant supernatural agency. This is not inconsistent with other beliefs in view of the Tamang attitude to illness which is similarly always ascribed to demons, and in view of the prevalence of rituals for cheating death and obtaining life, seen as the natural state.

Then there is the problem of the interrelationship of the three figures who are expelled. The rite certainly has strong purificatory and protective overtones; the idea is to cleanse the effects of death from the house and to protect other members of the household from a similar fate by sending the demon on its way out of the village. Bagh, the tiger, seems to act as a vehicle to carry away death, while the magic weapon *torma* bars his re-entry. The offerings comprise all the necessities of a journey and the lamas' words, as translated by Waddell (op cit: 494-5) are, "Now be off far from here! Begone to the country of our enemies!". However, no particular route or destination seems to be specified here. Moreover, Sandi is not directly identified with the deceased himself, as is the case with Thulung and Bhotia mortuary processions (Allen, 1974); if it functions as a substitute it is for death itself, not for the deceased.

Thirdly there is the question of why Sandi is identified as a 'god' when he is so clearly demonic in his nature, and why he 'eats' men's lives and is said to be particularly fond of fine food - seemingly a variation on the theme of 'eaters of souls' associated with witchcraft in many societies.

A certain amount of light can be thrown on these problems by considering the expulsion of the death demon as the transposition of the journey which has taken place in the morning to the cremation ground. By a reversal of the symbolic elements new implications are introduced which extend the significance of the dead man's journey. A number of common and reversed features indicate that the two are connected: the palanquin of Sandi initially occupies the same spot by the altar as did the corpse; both are borne away on elaborately decorated palanquins; both must be led or guided by a specialist;

both must be sent off with the requisite food, money and clothing for a journey. On the other hand the corpse was led by a lama using a white cloth and preceded by others playing instruments, but Sandi follows a path of water and is led by the shaman while the lamas remain behind; the corpse is followed by mourners, Sandi by armed men; the direction taken by Sandi is opposite to the one taken by the corpse; the corpse was consigned to the flames but Sandi is deposited intact outside the village.

I think the complementarity of these two journeys can be postulated by looking at the outcome both for the deceased and for the bereaved. In the first place, although there is little fear or disgust shown at the corpse itself which is however regarded as polluting, there is the strong feeling of danger for the whole community in the idea of death, shown particularly in the reluctance of the dead to leave their home and great fear of the harm they may do if allowed to linger. Both these journeys are concerned with removing something dangerous or polluting from inside the village to the outside. On the other hand in both cases what is removed is given the status of a god, maintaining a certain symmetry, although one is a polluting corpse and the other a dangerous demon. Raising the status of both in this way is in part a subterfuge by the bereaved in order to persuade or force them to go - providing them with the materials for a journey, dressing them up and carrying them off like great kings is the symbolic enactment of the journey which neither can refuse to make if the community itself is to survive the loss of a member without suffering further catastrophes.

This line of argument can be pushed further by examining why there should be a need for a double journey in the first place. We have already seen that, deriving from the Tibetan view, the Tamangs identify three major aspects of the person: the physical, comprising the elements which make up the person; the animating principle, the lung-ta or life-force; and the sem/nam-she which, although not equivalent to the soul in orthodox Buddhism, can be translated by this term without doing violence to the Tamang conception which also sees it as an immaterial essence capable of separate and eternal existence. The morning cremation dealt primarily with the physical side, reducing the five elements back to their original uncombined state and restoring them to the common pool; this leaves two aspects. The evening exorcism was designed to deal with the second aspect, the life-force.

This, by definition, has departed from the dead man and been consumed by the devouring demon which, like a vampire feeding on blood, becomes ever stronger and more able to overcome new victims; the life-force, beneficial as far as its owner is concerned, is subverted into a force for greater evil. Whereas the priests could deal with the pollutions of the body, the danger of the devouring demon is such that only the shaman can handle him with impunity.

Thus all that remains of the deceased after these two journeys is his soul which is the exclusive concern of the lamas; although it too would represent a danger to the community if it was not properly disposed of, a third journey will send it on its way in due course. For the mean time the nam-she remains linked to the altar by a dadar arrow which now stands where once the corpse and then the thread-cross had stood, to the right of the altar. The arrow acts like a sort of directional beacon or magnetic link, ensuring that however far the soul may wander during the intermediate phase it will never become totally separated from its own death altar.

The transitional phase

As in many other societies the Tamang funeral rites are followed by a transitional period during which the soul remains in limbo, neither part of human society nor yet incorporated into heaven. Less commonly, the peregrinations of the soul during this bardo, or intermediate period, have been formalized and recorded in the well-known work, the Bardo Thödol ('Tibetan Book of the Dead'), which is read at intervals for the edification and guidance of the soul (Evans-Wentz, 1960).

Immediately at the very instant of death the deceased's consciousness principle has the opportunity of shortcircuiting the long transitional period by recognising the clear light of enlightenment which dawns at this moment; those of great spiritual accomplishment and much accumulated merit can achieve instant release. According to the Bardo Thödol texts, a second opportunity dawns shortly after death but again those of ordinary accomplishment flee in terror from the light, so losing the opportunity. Failing to grasp this chance the nam-she hovers about near its home, not realising that its physical body has died but able to observe the weeping and wailing relatives. This text provides the basis for the lamas' ministrations during the transitional period which is almost invariably of exactly 49 days duration as specified.

Regardless of whether or not the body is physically present or has already been cremated, the soul is said to be 'asleep' for the first four days after death, its thoughts untroubled by karmically produced hallucinations. The lamas return on the fourth day after death to read the texts to the awakening soul and to introduce it to the second period of experiencing reality when for the next seven days it is confronted with visions of the peaceful deities and for the seven days thereafter visions of the wrathful deities, together with flashing lights, temptations by the various hells and frightening visions. This first ceremony is known as ngo-tö (Tib. ngo-sprod), the 'setting face-to-face (with reality)', i.e. the explanation of the after-death phenomena and preparation to withstand their effects.

After these first eighteen days have passed the visions of the soul on its wanderings become increasingly nightmarish and horrifying, although it is instructed to regard them as nothing but hallucinations produced by karma. Even at this late stage this simple recognition is sufficient to achieve liberation of the soul. But most people, deluded by the sins of anger, pride and lust continue in this state until the meeting with Shinje Chö-ki Gyelbo, Judge of the Dead, who weighs their merits and demerits and sends them on to their next existence. According to the text this is as likely as not to be rebirth and detailed instructions are provided for the choice of a satisfactory womb from which to re-enter the world.

The textual prescriptions are subverted in the Tamang performance to the extent that there is no assumption that the deceased's soul will have taken any of the opportunities which present themselves for liberation and so the whole cycle of rituals must be performed to be on the safe side, and in that the possibility of rebirth is largely ignored in favour of directing the soul to heaven. Village lamas regard their task during this whole transitional period as one of teaching the soul which path to take to reach heaven: it must select the white one, rejecting the blue path leading to the human world, the green to the animal world, the red to the lha-ma yin world, the yellow to the yidah world, and the grey-black to the hot and cold hells (7). They return at seven day intervals known as dün-dze (Tib. bdun-tshigs) (8) in order to arrest temporarily the wanderings of the soul and oblige it to listen to the text while it is fed by the surviving relatives (9). Most households that can afford it will on one or two of these occasions commission a much more elaborate version known as Ne-bar (10) which is conducted as follows.

The household altar is freshly decorated with flowers, butter lamps and fresh offerings. A very large tormas is made with three spires or pinnacles, whose height is further increased by the addition of wooden boards on which are impressed butter designs of the sun and moon, and of flowers. The three pinnacles represent the trinity of Opame, Chenrezi and Ghana Dorje and into the summit of each is stuck a little card on a bamboo stick bearing the appropriate picture of the god. The tormas of three or four protector gods are also made. To the right (facing) of the central tormas is placed the dadar arrow to attract the wandering soul, and to the left a flask of lustral water. Also placed on the altar at this stage is the deceased's namecard, the jang-ba (Tib. spyang-pu) - a woodblock print on locally made paper of a man, to which the deceased's name is added and the picture then stuck into an undecorated tormas. A group of male helpers set to to make 150 or so offering tormas out of cooked rice which are placed beside the altar; the lamas are then fed.

Next an effigy called gur (11) is made from the deceased's hat, jacket and bedding which are piled up on a tin trunk or convenient box; on top of it the namecard is placed and the whole construction set facing the lamas. The lamas call and embody the soul of the dead person in the gur effigy in much the same way as the gods are brought to their tormas (see Eliade, 1972: 439; Snellgrove, 1957 on calling the soul). Then on the finest silver and brass bowls a complete banquet is laid out in front of the effigy - tea, milk and raksi to drink, saffron rice, eggs, sweets, bread fried in oil, potatoes, apples, beaten rice to eat, and censer of burning juniper to smell - all a far cry from the ordinary fare of boiled potatoes and flour mush, indeed the most expensive and luxurious of foods which any guest can be guaranteed to appreciate. As the text notes, "As to food, only that which hath been dedicated to thee can be partaken of by thee, and no other food" (Evans-Wentz, 1960: 164). While the senior lama passes lamps and food offerings around the effigy and recites the mantra which will transmute the food into a suitable offering for the dead, the deceased's sons (or whoever the chief mourners may be) approach the effigy and make obeisance to it; its reality is such that they even cry genuinely before it as though their kinsman were really there and conscious of their efforts - which indeed they believe he is. The senior lama then purifies the dead man's soul by bathing in water a mirror in which is reflected the effigy and a man of the deceased's own generation addresses it and exhorts it to

partake of this fine array of food while it has the opportunity.

When the food and drink have been tasted by the dead man's spirit the remainder (minus the essence which it has absorbed) is transferred to a flat stone on which ashes and flour have been placed (to absorb impurities?) and the sons carry this out of the back door and a little distance away where they throw it down. They do likewise with some of the small tormas and butter lamps. When all the offerings have been presented and disposed of, the senior lama takes the namecard of the deceased and burns it in the flame of a butter lamp while instructing the dead man's soul to go straight to heaven. The chanting comes to an end, another meal is served and the tso tormas are distributed to the participants and to neighbours and visitors.

Food offerings are made in this way every seven days throughout the transitional period, although usually with rather less ceremony, and in this way the relatives maintain a relationship with their dead kinsman no less real for his being physically absent. And indeed throughout this time his property may not be disposed of, nor his widow married, nor his habitual rights and authority overridden in any way. Moreover additional merit has been transferred to his account through the performance of the rituals and his soul given additional instruction in how to reach heaven.

It is evident that a number of distinct strands run through the rituals of the transitional period. The first of these is the vital mediatory role of the lamas who maintain the ties between the dead and the living during this time before dissolving them after the 49 day period. It is also through their role as teachers that the soul gets another chance to overcome evil karma and still achieve heaven; its afterdeath fate is crucially in their hands, contributing to their pre-eminent position as religious specialists. There is no possibility here of an alternative shamanic set of death rituals, as is found for instance amongst the Gurungs of central Nepal (Messerschmidt, op. cit.). And finally the lamas are the medium through which the transfer of merit by the survivors to the dead takes place.

Merit transfer leads to the second theme, the duty of the bereaved during this time. This involves not only the prohibitions of mourning and the maintenance of the dead man's rights, but an active concern with his fate, for it must be remembered that the wandering nam-she is thought to be acutely aware of the efforts of his relatives

on his behalf. If they are dilatory he will become even more anxious and depressed about his condition, whereas if he sees that everything possible is being done his pleasure in their diligence will contribute to his own psychological state being a happy one, so reducing his terror in the bardo state and helping him to choose the right path. Thus the survivors, whatever their true feelings, are strongly constrained to make their best efforts and if their grief is real, will themselves find some psychological comfort in the knowledge that they are still helping their kinsman. Virtue here, as in all other lay observances, is produced by the sponsorship of rituals and the feeding of gods, lamas and fellow villagers.

But behind this solicitous concern with merit-making lies another less stressed but important theme - the continuing danger of the dead which can only be exorcised by getting rid of them once and for all. There remains the very real fear that if the rites are not properly conducted the soul may become trapped in the intermediate state and haunt the household or the village as a shinde, causing sickness and disaster. This idea is raised again and again in the texts, which convert the Buddhist ideal of non-attachment into entreaties to the soul to renounce its claims against the survivors or it will only bring further miseries on itself:

".....even if thou art attached to worldly goods left behind, thou wilt not be able to possess them, and they will be of no use to thee. Therefore, abandon weakness and attachment for them; cast them away wholly, renounce them from thy heart. No matter who may be enjoying thy worldly goods, have no feeling of miserliness, but be prepared to renounce them willingly." (Evans-Wentz, op. cit.: 70)

Thus a variety of motives, not excluding concern for social standing and prestige, as well as merit-making and fear of the return of the dead, underlie the rituals of the transitional period.

The concluding feast

The readings and the feeding of the gur effigy continue at seven day intervals up to the 49th day when the final rites are conducted at the enormous feast known as the gyewa. Such concluding feasts are a common feature of death rituals in many Himalayan societies. Among the Sherpas von Fürer-Haimendorf says that this "is basically not a religious rite, but a dispensation of charity

to villagers...." (von Führer-Haimendorf, 1964: 242). Although the Tamang gyewa also involves charitable giving it has many religious and symbolic aspects, being both a celebration of the arrival of the soul in heaven and the conclusion of all his social ties with this world and the release of the mourners from their obligations to the dead.

The performance of the gyewa is the responsibility of the agnatic kin of the deceased, particularly those who stand as his inheritors. Thus ordinarily a man's sons do his gyewa, or his brothers if there are no sons, or exceptionally it might devolve on his grandsons or nephews. In the case of someone who dies childless or too young to have any inheritors the duty reverts back to the father or senior male agnates. In the case of a woman first responsibility goes to her husband or, if she is a widow, to her sons; but if she is divorced or unmarried to her father or brothers. When a married woman dies the gyewa should be held in her village of residence but readings will also be conducted in her natal village; sometimes women who feel their time of dying is near prefer to return to their natal village to die there. Very poor families can delay the performance of the gyewa for up to a year while they try to amass the very large sums of money required; this is fairly rare and much looked down on; in the majority of cases the gyewa is performed at the correct time.

The cost of the gyewa is immense, probably the largest single expenditure which a Tamang would ever make. As yet there is no move to curtail these costs, as has happened among more progressive status seeking groups such as the Thakali of the Thak Kholā region. Not only must a dozen or so lamas be paid and fed and all the usual altar offerings be provided, but the entire community must be fed several times; this may mean anything up to 1000 meals together with drink. To some extent the expense is mitigated by the guests' own contribution of a māna of rice and a jug of liquor, but there are still many items which must be provided by the hosts. An average cost would appear to be about Rs 2000, with even the very cheapest costing Rs 1000. The most expensive feast of which I heard was for a lama and cost Rs 6000, a figure still mentioned by his kinsmen with a mixture of pride and chagrin. Given that a man may have to contribute to both his father's and his mother's gyewa, and to those of one or more wives, and possibly for a younger brother or sister and a child or children who may predecease him, the total expenditure for an average family over its lifetime may easily come to Rs 6000 or

more. Some idea of the enormity of this figure can be gained from the fact that it is roughly equivalent to $1\frac{1}{2}$ times the value of the average house, or half the value of the average landholding. If not carefully planned for, or if by mischance several deaths occur close together, the expense may necessitate selling off parcels of land or jewellery or other assets, or else incurring large debts.

The gyewa is usually but not invariably held in the village gampa. Preparations begin up to 24 hours in advance with the manufacture of the altar tormas, the highest rank comprising the deities Opame, Thuji Chenpo (Chenrezi), Guru Rinpoche, Guru Dragpo and Kando. The gampa and altar are lavishly decorated with hanging thankas, hundreds of burning butter lamps, the beautifully coloured and decorated tormas, and the polished and shining brassware - offering bowls, cymbals and other instruments. The actual ceremony will not begin until after dark and the preceding day is utilised for the continuing preparations. Huge tureens of rice have to be cooked by volunteer helpers and the rice then moulded into many hundreds of tormas for distribution to the guests; women wash their hair and prepare their best clothes; and the lamas supervise the printing of a fresh prayer flag (mani par pung-pa) dedicated to Chenrezi on which his mantra is repeated over and over again.

In the evening the gur effigy is set up before the altar and the lamas begin the readings, first from the Kwinji Chöndi, then from the Mani Kahbum, calling the gods and the dead man's nam-she and presenting the offerings. As in other temple rituals the shaman also presents the hindering demons with their food and libation, commanding them "eat! eat!". The guiding idea of the ritual, its core theme, is the final dissolution of the deceased's earthly ties and the presentation of his soul to the gods so that they will help convey him to one of the heavens, preferably that of Opame.

As darkness falls various parties of guests start to arrive. They say that they would be ashamed to come in daylight (N - lāj ^{seem} lāgyo, presumably because to arrive too early would/like an indecent haste to obtain one's share of the hospitality. Groups from neighbouring villages are met with welcoming draughts of beer or raksi before they enter the gampa courtyard. Although an important part of the gyewa is the absolutely impartial feeding of whichever guests turn up, it is also true to say that the majority of those who attend have links with the deceased and indeed represent the whole gamut of

his social ties. The feast is the fullest expression of these relations and also the occasion of their termination. Among those there will be the agnatic kin acting as hosts and the wife-giving and wife-taking lineages who have a special part to play and represent the affinal links created by the deceased's own marriage and those of his daughters. These guests represent relations of alliance and descent, affinity and consanguinity, men and women, young and old. In addition his ritual brothers (mit) are there, his neighbours and co-villagers and members of his clan from other villages (possibly the only public expression of the theoretical unity of the clan). His trading partners and other contacts come too, and in the case of a shaman or lama members of his profession may attend from all over the region, particularly if he is a well-known and respected teacher in which case many will be his pupils. Like potlatches, feasts of merit and other ceremonial occasions of gift-giving the size of the turnout and the lavishness of the occasion are directly related to the social standing of the deceased. A highly venerated village elder's feast may draw up to 500 people, while the unmarried sister of a more insignificant villager may have only a hundred or so guests.

The liturgy and ritual observances continue all night but the guests mostly build fires outside and sit around in groups chatting and drinking. A meal is served to all and the gur effigy is fed for the final time, a last supper as it were in the company of his fellows. This is the final duty of the lineage towards him. Now the classificatory sons-in-law remove the effigy from the gumpa to the fields outside where it is broken up and the clothes burned. The lamas burn the jang-he, his namecard, for the last time and the dead man's soul is now formally translated to heaven or another rebirth; his links with the living are concluded. From now on his name should not be spoken again, particularly by his agnatic kin, a rule to which most adhere firmly (12).

The following morning the widow and the wife-giving lineage play a prominent role in making obeisances to the altar and in offering up butter lamps for the deceased. Another meal is served to the guests, some of whom are by now insensate from excessive drinking and have to be led away. The occasion has a definite cathartic element in which the restraint and sobriety of the preceding seven weeks give way to increasingly vigorous joking and horseplay. Finally

long lines of men and women form up to dance and sing the traditional Tamang songs for a couple of hours, a pleasure which has been denied throughout the transitional period and a public acknowledgement that the mourning is at an end. Eventually the guests start to leave for home.

One last small but significant rite remains. The main altar torma, Opame, is removed from its position and, draped in ceremonial scarves, is carried by the deceased's eldest son (or whoever is the senior agnatic kinsman) through the village to his house, preceded by lamas playing cymbals and drums and followed by the remaining kin and lamas. The torma is briefly placed on an impromptu altar in front of the house and the lamas perform a lumbering danced circumambulation of it three times before it is taken inside and placed on the household altar as a memento mori. The deceased's soul and the Buddha Opame are now as one, the former hopefully incorporated into the heaven of the latter. The death ceremonies are at an end and the son feeds those present for the last time.

The corpse, the death demon and the soul have all been disposed of in the proper manner, each has departed from the village and the survivors can relax in the knowledge that they have done everything possible on behalf of the dead man and also to protect themselves and the community from the malevolence of death. There is no cult of the dead or ancestor worship (except in the generalised context of the clan god ceremonies), although memorial rites may occasionally be held. However, excepting the rather special beliefs of the shaman, the deceased has now passed beyond further need for human action and himself has no further interest in or influence over his earthly survivors.

The son, by returning to the family house carrying the torma of the gyewa ceremony, is publicly attesting to his own new status - legitimised by the lamas' dance also - as the recognised head of the household. With the conclusion of the mortuary rites comes the creation of new rights and duties, just as those of the deceased are recognised as being at an end. Thus in the case of a man's death it is up to his younger brother to perform the leviratic marriage with the widow, substituting for his brother in every way and maintaining the relationship created by the marriage unbroken. More generally, the spouse of the deceased is now free to remarry, although it is usual to wait a year or thereabouts before doing so. In

addition the dead man's property can now be disposed of, although some of the tensions which may surround the transmission of property rights from one generation to the next (Goody, 1962: Ch XIII) have already been absorbed by the custom of handing on a share in the land to sons within three to five years of their marriage, so that the father gradually divests himself of both property and the web of rights and duties which it entails. An elderly widower may have fully retired from any active interest in his estate and gone to live with a married daughter, leaving only a few personal items to be disposed of. On the other hand, where the process of transmission has not run its course, it is the widow who substitutes for her husband, retaining her right to live in the property and manage the remaining estate assisted by the youngest son who, as a recompense, receives the family home as well as his share of land on the death of his mother. Occasionally, if the legitimate heir is a minor unable to defend his interests, powerful and unscrupulous relatives may gain control of the estate. Even where all property has been handed ^{on} / it is done on the assumption of a reciprocation: namely that those who inherited will stand by their obligation to provide for the funeral and gyewa, in this way ploughing back a considerable portion of the estate into the well-being of the dead parent's soul.

Important though these social adjustments are in permitting society to continue unchanged, even as its individual members are lost to it, they are clearly not the whole story. The complexities of the death rites go far beyond the necessities of providing for the transmission of rights and duties from one generation to the next. They lay bare a complete eschatology, providing a ritual summation of the meaning of life: out of dissolution and decay comes a new beginning, but one for which the individual bears a lot of responsibility. Whether it is to be the dreary torture of a rebirth in the same (or a worse) sphere of existence or whether it is to be a glorious afterlife in the company of the gods depends ultimately on how that life has been lived, the touchstone being the performance of social and religious duties. The unsocial and irreligious can expect the worst, while those who have avoided sin and built up merit can expect that their efforts and those of their specialists and relatives will have a happy outcome. The religious system thus provides a powerful system of social control.

The death rituals are replete with symbolism and are remarkable for the way in which they involve the cooperation of both Buddhist lamas and shamans. The full range of the pantheon from devouring demons to highest gods is brought into play and requires the competence of both types of specialist; the ritual modes of protection, exorcism and offering are all employed in a concerted display of the placating, controlling and worshipping responses which Tamangs employ to deal with disturbances in their environment. The processual form of the rituals follows that identified by Hertz (1960) as a feature of many societies - a double funeral separated by a transitional period during which the survivors adjust to the death and the soul undertakes its own quest. This again is common with many societies takes the form of a journey to the land of the dead in the course of which the soul must meet and overcome many dangers and face judgement before he reaches the destination. The symbolism of the journey is interpreted by Goody as the physical parallel to the social separation caused by the death (*ibid*: 374), while Eliade traces this sort of 'funerary geography' back to the ecstatic adventures of the shamans (1972: 509).

Both these views (not of course mutually exclusive) are relevant to the Tamang death rites which, however, go still further in their elaboration of the symbolism of the journey. I noted that the opening funeral rites comprised two journeys in opposite directions, dealing with different aspects of the person and involving two types of religious specialist. The keynote of these journeys was the idea of dissolution and expulsion, removing the evil of death and its victim from the village, but the offering of the corpse on the flames of the pyre also expressed an intention of transformation and reintegration. The concluding feast takes up this theme more powerfully, once again by means of the double journey. On the physical plane there is the transfer of the gur effigy as container of the deceased's soul to the gumpa, and then, after the soul's metaphysical transfer to the heaven of Opame, the destruction of the gur - a reiteration of the original cremation with its transfer of an 'essence' and destruction of the physical casing or container. The social concomitant of this integration is made manifest in the last of the quartet of journeys, from the gumpa back to the house with the tormo bearing witness to the union of the deceased with Opame, the severing of his involvement in village affairs and his legitimate replacement by his heirs.

However, this quartet of journeys do not all have the same character. Three of them depend on a physical enactment as the primary component accompanied by verbalisation - the body to the cremation, the expulsion of the devouring demon, and the bringing of the tormas to the house. The fourth, the actual journey of the soul, depends primarily on verbalisations with the physical transfer of the effigy only a minor element. The soul must find its path by listening to the words of the lamas, and not with the assistance of a psychopomp. The absence or loss of a shamanic alternative to the Buddhist funeral has given primacy to the power of words over the physical guidance which a true psychopomp can provide. The high gods are influenced by the repetition of their mantras to extend their assistance and the soul is guided by the teachings of the Bardo Thödol. Sociologically they may be said to work because they are spoken by specialists who have the authority to use them by virtue of their own training (Tambiah, 1970: 198). The lamas have this exclusive power by virtue of their initiation during the tsam or retreat, when by conducting the ritual service of the gods they gain familiarity with the peaceful and wrathful guardians who throng the route of the dead and to an extent mastery over them.

Finally I would note that on each of the quartet of journeys the lamas play a different part. On the way to the cremation ground they are guides, leading the pollutions of death away from the village and the corpse to its dissolution; during the expulsion of the death demon they are masters or directors who command the shaman to bear away the demons; in the transfer of the soul to heaven they act as teachers, reading the instructions of the Bardo Thödol; finally by accompanying the heir back to the house and dancing on his courtyard they give public witness to his new position and invest it with legitimacy.

Notes to Chapter 8

- (1) Cf the kem-chang and semsum gifts of the Sherpas (von Führer-Haimendorf, 1964: 229 & 237).
- (2) Das (1977) notes of Hindu cremation the strong association of the corpse with the notion of sacrifice to the fire god Agni, and the divinity which is ascribed to it.
- (3) Apparently the exact reverse of the Sherpa custom where it is the bereaved who makes a cash gift to the participants just before the cremation (Ortner, op cit: 108). It is the same with the Buddhist ceremony of the Lepchas of Sikkim (Gorer, op cit: 349). The Tamang participants in the concluding feast, the gyewa, again make a cash donation to the bereaved, whereas with the Sherpas it is once more the other way round.
- (4) The fullest account is for Sikkim by Waddell (op cit: 494 n4); another version among the Lepchas of Sikkim is related by Gorer (ibid: 350) who describes the principal figure as 'a Cat'; Lepcha followers of the non-Buddhist Mun religion perform a similar ceremony to kill the demon Shom mung who would otherwise prevent the soul from reaching Rum lyang, the place of the gods, and would continue to kill members of the family one by one (Nebesky-Wojkowitz, 1951: 29). Finally there is a Sherpa variant known as do dzongup (Ortner, ibid: 93).
- (5) According to Ortner (ibid) it is not this figure, i.e. the demon, but the tiger who is called sende, either a misunderstanding or a rather different interpretation by the Sherpas who evidently feel that the tiger is the embodiment of the demons rather than their vehicle. The Tamang construction differs from other accounts in not having humanoid figures leading and driving the tiger.
- (6) The associations between Mahādeo and the tiger figure call to mind the Newar deity Bāgh Bhairava, worshipped particularly at Kirtipur and Nayakot as a fierce deity in the form of a tiger. The Bhairavas are associated with the destructive form of Siva and as a divine vehicle of locomotion (Nepali, 1965: 300ff).
- (7) On the colour symbolism see Evans-Wentz, 1960: xxvii ff) and Govinda (op cit: 115-22).
- (8) According to Das (1976: 1027) this is the ritual done on the 49th day.
- (9) Eliade draws attention to this psychopompic function as a sur-

Notes cont.

vival and re-evaluation of more ancient shamanic motifs of Central Asia (1972: 438ff).

(10) Among the Sherpas napur.

(11) Cf the ten effigy of the Sherpas and the plah of the Gurungs. Also see Macdonald (1975a: 153ff note 48) on the Yolmali gyewa where the effigy is also known as gur and Gorer (loc cit) on the Lepcha sanglion where a similar effigy (no name given) is made.

(12) Messerschmidt (loc cit) is able to document the complex prestations which flow between the affines and the deceased and his surviving agnates in the Gurung memorial rite of Pai. I was not aware of such a developed system in the Tamang gyewa and although the data may be deficient here the available evidence suggested that apart from feeding the deceased the principal prestations flowed between the agnatic kin and the whole range of guests on each occasion - the former acting as hosts and the latter making the 'sympathy offerings' to them, as detailed above.

CHAPTER NINE

CONCLUSION

This study of a Tamang community living above the upper reaches of the Bhote Kholā in northern Nepal has sought to demonstrate the interplay between religion and society amongst a little-known population, and to uncover the underpinnings of their religious life through the examination of ritual practice and its associated beliefs and specialists.

The opening chapters on Tamang social life have shown that this has been deeply influenced by a process of continual borrowing and synthesis of social and cultural elements from their Tibetan and Hindu neighbours to the north and south respectively. This has resulted from their being situated on a communication route between Tibet and the Kathmandu Valley which has given them access to important cultural, religious and trading centres. Despite this the Tamangs of this area have retained their own separate identity, never becoming absorbed into the mainstream of either Tibetan or Hindu society. In the case of the latter their distance from the political and social centre of Kathmandu, the inferior ranking assigned to them in the caste system and the practice of tribal and caste endogamy has excluded them from significant participation in the economic and political life of Nepal, while their settlement in higher altitude, non rice-growing areas has protected them from Hindu infiltration. In the case of Tibetan society linguistic differences, the practice of endogamous and localised marriage and the political control of their lands by the kingdom of Nepal has militated against more extensive intermingling with Tibetan populations. Tibetan religious culture has, however, influenced them deeply.

The particular character exhibited by the tribal population of this part of Nepal cannot be said to be generally applicable to the Tamangs as a whole. Those living nearer the Kathmandu Valley and in the east of the country have evolved a different modus vivendi with their neighbours. In some respects it is thus more apposite to see the Tamangs of the Bhote Kholā area not so much as representative of a single ethnic group but as a point on a continuum in the

blending of Tibetan and Nepali culture which has a variety of manifestations. As such the most satisfactory point of comparison may not be with other Tamangs so much as with neighbouring tribal groups like the Sherpas and Gurungs who have been influenced in a similar manner.

Within the community work, social intercourse and religious activity are organised according to dimensions of time and space which reflect the various influences to which the area has been subject and the particular accommodation with them which the Tamangs have evolved. Economic activity is dominated by the agricultural year which is organised according to the solar cycle. The changing seasons determine the tempo of life, the character of the work in hand and the time periods available for various non-economic pursuits. Their passing is marked by a series of public rituals which are associated with securing the crops and giving thanks for a successful harvest. Their social orientation is towards the immediate community and its neighbours and its spiritual orientation is towards the local deities (and their counterparts, the local demons) who are intimately involved in everything to do with the land. The centre of the ritual field is Gosāikund, focus of an important pilgrimage and abode of the most powerful of local gods who in turn oversee subordinate deities.

Intermeshing with the agricultural year is the Buddhist lunar cycle with its calendar of public rituals which engage the energy and attention of most if not all the community at regular intervals. Some of the fruits of production will be diverted to the support of this religious activity whose principal objective is to invoke the participation of the high Buddhist gods in the concerns of the villagers and to orient the latter towards the spiritual benefits which can be derived - principally the rewards of heaven for a life lived according to the dictates of moral duty and compassion.

Finally there is the individual life cycle marked by ceremonies of marriage, ritual brotherhood and death which establish and dissolve membership of clan and lineage groups, households and friendship networks. These relationships are further reaffirmed by a series of calendrical festivals and private rituals whose spiritual orientation is diverse, involving Buddhism, especially in the funeral ceremonies and to a limited extent in marriage, Hinduism in the all-Nepal festivals which are occasions for family celebration, and shamanism in the pilgrimages and various curative rites which help restore harmony in social relations by dispelling threatening influences.

The account of Tamang religious life within this spatio-temporal framework which has been given here suggests that it has two principal foci, two dominant schema in terms of which it is conceptualised and organised. The first of these is what may be termed the traditional complex - ideas, beliefs and actions mainly internally generated by the society and sustained by it which are thought to provide the grounds for its existence. The traditional complex provides a set of concepts which organise local space, account for Tamang 'history' and village organisation by reference to the formation and spread of the clans, demarcate time in terms of the seasonal and agricultural cycles. Additionally it provides a methodology for ensuring their continuity and stability and for dealing with aberrant events such as crop failure or illness which present some sort of threat to the social structure.

The traditional complex is parochial in the sense that its particular beliefs and practices are confined to a limited geographical area. This extends beyond the village to embrace a number of other settlements, either those explicitly paired through the linking of overseeing deities, or those which acknowledge local sites such as Gosāikund as religious centres within whose field they fall. As one moves further from any particular centre so the overlap in belief and practice lessens but nevertheless the general referents of the traditional complex probably remain much the same, as does the religious teleology.

This has two clear goals. First there is simply the re-creation of traditional authority through the agency of its guarantors - the clan gods, the masters of the earth, the mountain gods, the sun, moon and planetary gods. Through the acknowledgement of their continuing power the foundations of the community are re-established and protected. In practical terms this means the crops will continue to flourish, the elements cooperate in men's endeavours, and the web of social relations will be reaffirmed.

The second goal is a more active concern with bringing about changes in men's circumstances when disharmony prevails as a result of a breakdown of this traditional authority. The aim is to reconstitute the world and so restore harmony, its supposed natural state of being. Threats to harmony come from outside, from the depredations of legions of different evil spirits who manifest their activity in causing illness, death, misfortune, crop failures and so on.

Ritual is here concerned with identifying the source of the disharmony (through divination or trance) and neutralising it, usually by its expulsion back out of the community into the beyond whence it came. Exorcistic rites are the principal example of the attempt to make objective changes in external circumstances and bend them to men's will.

The second religious focus is what may be called the universal complex - universal in the sense that it stands outside any one particular society, claiming applicability to all men and unlimited in its geographical spread. Its teleology is different, rituals being concerned with the reconstitution or redefinition of human existence. This complex aspires to explain the universal grounds of the cosmos - its governing principles - which extend, as macrocosm embraces microcosm, to human reality. Meaning in human existence ultimately comes not merely from living in accordance with traditional precepts but from aligning one's life with values of truth and virtue implicit in the workings of the cosmos. Rather than a system of meanings projected outwards on to the world - society generating its own traditions and then being repossessed by them so that social relations appear as their product - the universal complex offers an externally validated and codified system of meanings which correspond to a claimed ultimate truth not restricted to any one society or social group. The goal of ritual then is to make this truth manifest and to realign the lives of the participants in its terms. In this the agency of the high gods is vital for they can confer the qualities of understanding and compassion which make the cosmos intelligible. If men can participate in these qualities - the object of the offering rituals - they can rise above the human condition to a state of divinity which no longer distinguishes between human and natural, human and divine or microcosm and macrocosm: truth is immanent in all being.

These three major religious goals - stabilisation of existing affairs, restoring harmony when it is threatened, and giving life meaning in terms of an ultimate truth - are worked out in the three ritual modes the discussion of which constituted Chapters 4, 5 and 6: protection, exorcism and offering.

However, as the body of this thesis has tried to make clear, it would be wrong to equate the universal complex with Buddhism, or with the lamas, or with a 'great' or sophisticated tradition and to separate off the traditional complex as being the preserve of 'animism' or

shamanism, or as a 'little' or popular tradition. Such a neat demarcation would entirely obscure the more complex way in which so-called religious 'systems' in actuality are woven into a single, if many-stranded, religious practice. Examination of this practice reveals that while the shamanic enterprise is primarily involved in the first two of these goals Buddhism is involved in all three. It is certainly not just concerned with salvation but with action in the world. This interpenetration of both complexes by different religious ideologies creates the potential for opposition, competition, cooperation and hierarchisation between the two religious enterprises in pursuit of these goals. To see this pattern of relations involves an examination of the institutions of shamanism and the priesthood in terms of their differing knowledge, power, authority and morality, and of the rituals they conduct in terms of their different stratagems for achieving these goals.

The shaman's authority to act as a religious specialist flows from his close links with the ancestral and territorial guardians. Different types of shaman are distinguished according to the quality of those links: some receive knowledge directly from the gods themselves, some stand in a hereditary line which reaches back to the First Shaman who in turn was instructed by the gods, and some have learned their craft from one of the former types. The quality of their authority is correlated with the closeness of the links which they can demonstrate with the traditional source. Moreover, all shamans through their mastery of ecstasy and their receptivity to possession have the power to mediate directly between their human clients and the traditional guardians. They are not only the mouth-piece of the gods but effectively regenerate them as well.

The traditional basis of shamanic authority naturally tends to locate them principally in terms of the traditional complex, concerned with effecting real changes in the circumstances of their clients - making them well, protecting them from danger, and so on. They give meaning to their clients' experiences of misfortune by stressing that they are departures from or anomalies in the social system and by grounding them in an accepted cosmology; they then operate through the same set of beliefs to reorder what has become disordered. In this they are at the service of the community since most misfortunes go beyond the purely personal to disrupt the (supposed) harmony of community life.

The shaman must be seen as more than a traditional healer using magical techniques to banish evil. He, no less and perhaps more than most members of the community, stands in relation to and is influenced by the universal complex. His rituals, while excluding all Buddhist deities and the specific values they represent, acknowledge and indeed reach out towards deities of wider provenance than the purely local and in so doing take the first steps in orienting his followers towards that part of the universal complex in which Hinduism is in direct competition with Buddhism. The shaman himself cannot put forward a claim to straddle the universal complex for his practice lacks the necessary context of truth and morality, but by attuning his followers to the alternatives offered by Hinduism he has a potentially subversive effect on Buddhist hegemony.

By contrast the Buddhist lamas must be primarily located in the terms of the universal complex. They do not have the direct linkage with the territorial and ancestral gods which the shamans boast. Instead their authority derives from access to the sacred books, with literacy obviously a prime requirement, and from the ritual service of the gods. The texts themselves and the particular quality of the teacher-pupil linkage connects the priesthood to the religious source, while the practice of tsam - a renunciation of social ties and meditation on the qualities of the divinity - expresses a personal commitment to Buddhist values. In terms of the universal complex the Buddhist lama is not concerned so much with the community as with the individual. Although the values espoused are universal in the sense of being applicable to all men everywhere, liberation remains an individual goal realised through personal conduct and individual striving for union with divinity. The fact that many of the great Buddhist rituals have the effect of drawing the community together is more of an unintended side-effect than their raison d'être.

But just as the shaman is able to act as a bridge between the traditional and the universal complex through his capacity (expressed as access to non-local gods) to direct his followers towards other values than the purely instrumental use of power, so the lama is drawn into using Buddhism to make the reverse transition, by incorporating within its competence the instrumental goals of the traditional complex. He can move from the more exalted planes of liberation to the use of power to effect cures, protect the village and so on. Speculatively one could say that this resulted from the historical development of

of the priesthood and the incorporation of shamanic elements by early Buddhism when it reached the Tibetan culture area and was obliged to respond to popular needs. More importantly, from the viewpoint of current religious dynamics, the lama's access to instrumental power is not based, like the shaman's, on the traditional authority of the local gods but on the detachment of Buddhist deities from their grounding in universal values and their redirection towards more immediate personal and community goals. Despite this redirection from otherworldly aims to mundane ones, the lamas' rituals retain the 'aura' of the moral system which is their principal setting and so tend to be seen as more prestigious, more powerful than those offered by the shamans.

With this continuing implication in mundane community affairs it is not surprising to find other associated transformations in the priesthood which retains little of the classical conception of mendicant monks except for a few vestigial symbols such as the annual begging round. Priests remain in their community as householders and part-time specialists and their calling has become, like the shaman's a predominantly hereditary one. Nevertheless, a move too far in this direction risks severing the linkage with the universal values which ultimately validate the lama's role. If he were nothing but a hereditary healer-cum-magician the credibility of his authority would be damaged and unfavourable comparisons with the shamans might result. For this reason it is vital that the village Buddhist system maintains its ties with the wider religious hierarchy, that its practitioners make at least a temporary symbolic renunciation of their householder status and that, if at all possible, they can even elevate one of their number to a tulku or reincarnation, so ensuring an even higher status.

Having distinguished the two foci of religious action and the three goals towards which it may be directed it is possible to see the interrelationship of the whole variety of Tamang rituals.

In Tamang terms the first major category is sül-pa or supplication - rituals directed at the stabilisation of the world and the protection of the community. Sül-pa rituals are not the preserve of any one group of specialists exclusively: a householder may conduct his own ritual which may consist only in some minor gesture such as the leaving of an offering to placate a local godling; the tribal priest, the

lha-bön, once had a prominent role in conducting supplicatory rituals for the protection of the village; the householder or the Buddhist lamas may undertake the worship of the clan god.

Such rituals naturally come within the purview of the traditional complex, but what one sees developing is a fairly pronounced opposition between alternative methods of relating to the traditional world. The tribal priest's and the layman's role has been diminished, in fact almost squeezed out, by competition from Buddhism which can claim to deal more powerfully with the traditional complex by virtue of its different approach. The layman places himself in a position of humble submission and stresses his ancestral linkage with the gods and dependence on them. The lama offers his moral authority deriving from his relationship to the high Buddhist gods. The rituals they conduct, particularly the ke-lha (birth-god) worship have quite different characters, although both are referred to as sül-pa and both are concerned with stability and protection. The householder's version retains the placatory attitude towards those deities linked with territorial and socio-political divisions in the area and seeks to reaffirm their authority. But the Buddhist version is concerned not with the appeasement of the local gods but with the array of Buddhist power as the final guarantor of the traditional order. The lama is able to coerce the protector gods into his service and thus the service of the household and the community by virtue of his direct access to the high Buddhist gods whom the protectors are oath-bound to serve. The ritual proceeds not through humble submission to the traditional gods but through a mixture of offerings and threats which exemplify the lama's control over the protectors and, through them, his ability to keep evil forces at bay. The celebration of traditional authority has been supplanted in favour of the moulding of events according to the dictates of Buddhist theology.

The situation is rather different in the second ritual mode - that of kla-pa or exorcism - for here the two approaches, Buddhist and shamanic, although in competition with one another are not opposed in terms of their methods. In both cases shaman and lama attempt to control events through the exercise of their personal power over and through their respective deities. The shaman is concerned not with placating the local deities but with bringing into play a huge array of ancestral shamans, familiar spirits and assistants - a pantheon constituted in the manner of the Buddhist guardians and protectors

even though their respective symbolic attributes are very different. Both shaman and lama are able to coerce the protector gods with the assistance of the ancestor shamans or wrathful deities respectively. The processual form of both types of exorcism also depend on similar procedures, namely enticing demons with offerings, trapping them in a physical structure and destroying them outside the boundaries of the village.

Here the conception of instrumental power is identical in both cases - the officiant is the locus of a battle between good and evil. Although the overt difference between the shaman's ecstasy and possession by spirits, and the lama's invocation of the Buddhist gods is very considerable, in principle the methodology of the exorcism is always the same. The religious specialist, using his distinctive techniques and on the basis of his particular authority, arrays the forces of both good and evil in a sacred space which includes within its field the client; he then proceeds to pit good against evil in a way which not only recalls their protean struggles in the religious mythology but which has distinct personal references for the client. The final outcome is never really in doubt but, like the performance of some daring trick by a circus artiste, the ritual contains sufficient possibilities of danger and disaster to create a dramatic tension. If indeed there is some psychological gain to the client it is one of catharsis and relief at the successful conclusion of the ritual, as when an audience applauds a lion-tamer emerging victorious from the cage, but with the added personal relevance that the client is in as much danger as the performer. The competition then is a direct one between the traditional authority of the shaman and the Buddhist power of the lama operating in a common field of action.

Turning to the third category of Tamang ritual, offering (che-pa), we are involved with a different teleology. Here it is not instrumental power to change existing circumstances which is sought but rather the reverse - power to change the person's relationship with the cosmos, to overcome his circumstances by redefining him as the agent (with divine assistance) of his own salvation which consists in a realignment with cosmic processes. The ritual structure is quite different from that of exorcism - indeed it reverses its principal features - and takes a variety of different forms, from the regular monthly temple ceremony to the full death ritual, the last and most important attempt to integrate person and cosmos.

In this preoccupation with changing the person traditional knowledge plays no direct part. It is not in adherence to the norms of social structure that salvation is to be found but on the contrary by overcoming the false dualities created by society. Worship through offerings is then supremely the Buddhist field of action, although the shaman too has a role to play. This time he is working in cooperation with the Buddhist enterprise by acting as a conduit for the making of offerings to the hindering demons and removing ransom tormas for the death demons. In order to bring about the alignment of the worshippers with the divine forces the lamas must work in a setting of purity which would evidently be put at risk were they simultaneously to have too close dealings with the forces of evil which must first be cleared. Here a partnership with the shaman works well, the one dealing with the demands of the traditional complex leaving the other free to devote himself to the transformative aspects of the universal complex.

The different ritual modes, then, are a response to the different teleologies. In respect of the goals which relate to the traditional complex non-Buddhist and Buddhist action present alternative, competitive and sometimes opposed responses; however, for the goal of liberation/salvation/heaven Buddhism provides the only means. Taken as a whole therefore, Tamang rituals exhibit two further characteristics - complementarity and hierarchy. The quest for liberation is not really a practicable task while the community or the individual is under attack from the forces of evil; their removal and the stabilisation of the worshipper's circumstances are a necessary prelude to the bid for the compassion and wisdom which the high gods represent. Successful achievement of the goals of the traditional complex, by whatever means, are an indispensable preface to the goals of the universal complex. However, there is no doubt that these are differently valued objectives. Liberation (or heaven) and by extension the whole framework of meaning established by Buddhism rank above the concern with personal and communal security embodied in the traditional complex. Whether it be in terms of power or morality the Buddhist gods are seen as superior to the localised protectors and similarly their servants/mediators/controllers the lamas outrank the shamans.

The consequence of this is not that shamans lead some kind of peripheral possession cult designed to express the frustrations of

the socially marginal vis-à-vis politically powerful Buddhists, for Tamang society is not segmented in that way. Rather, it gives to Buddhism a central position as the dominant societal ideology through its capacity to integrate meaning at a higher order than the traditional complex alone can. Not only does Buddhism have a far greater degree of geographical spread and historical depth as well as standardisation and systematisation, but it offers a more generalised account of the human predicament and, most importantly of all, a means of transcending it. With Buddhism occupying the dominant place, shamanism can in some respects be seen as encouraging and promoting an alternative, even subversive, ideology. For example, the shamans are prepared to make distinctly non-Buddhist blood sacrifices, to condone tacitly the slaughter of animals which characterises various Hindu festivals, to act as an alternative religious leader at pilgrimages, and to act in some respects as a fifth column for the importation of Hindu or all-Nepal deities, festivals and ideas. The hierarchy is thus not altogether a stable one and depends for its continuation on the dynamic renewal and even expansion of Buddhism. For were this to wither through local indifference, through the loss of priestly prestige, or even through the sheer lack of sufficient recruitment to the priesthood, an alternative ideology lies in wait in the shape of Hinduism which in time could take over the goals of the universal complex in a way that the shamans never could.

With these points in mind it is now possible to re-examine Tamang religion at a different level of abstraction that goes beyond the emic categories displayed in the various ritual modes. The involvement of both Buddhism and shamanism in the whole gamut of religious goals suggests that it is inappropriate to see them as standing in the relationship of religion to magic, the one orienting a moral community of believers towards liberation from the conditions of worldly existence, the other a mistaken essay at applied science used to deal with individual problems. Nor does it help to try to account for the involvement of Buddhism in a wide range of 'magical' acts by splitting it into a series of 'systems' supposedly historically evolved through the accommodation of the founder's original insight to the needs of the world.

Instead their interrelationship can be seen as the product of a variety of different ways of thinking about, relating to and acting

upon the supernatural world. The starting point for this examination is that Tamang rituals are clearly intended to bring about certain effects; in some circumstances they are designed to affect the objective world, in others to affect the participants and in others again to do both. The sense in which they can be said to achieve this involves looking at the different strategies which underlie them and these strategies in turn link up with the symbolism of the ritual. A complete account involves a concern with both the sociological significance of the ritual and with its capacity to act as a powerful vehicle for creating and sustaining meaning.

The first stratagem to be considered is exemplified by the lay version of the birth-god ceremony (Chapter 4) and is based on submission, homage and an attempt to placate the territorial deities in order to win their protection. It is modelled on the relationship of the peasant-farmer to his landlord, in which ^{each} has certain rights and duties created by their respective positions - the landowner to collect rent or tax and require labour or produce for his own use in return for permitting the farmer to cultivate his land. This relationship is reaffirmed in specific ways - by the farmer expressing his inferiority to and dependence on the landowner who in turn is obliged to justify his superior position by extending protection to those who farm for him; in such a feudal system he in turn is part of a hierarchy owing his duty in return for his position to another overlord, right up to the king. With the growth of a modern administrative and revenue collecting system this relationship is no longer particularly salient in Tamang life, but it still informs that part of the religious enterprise directed towards the land-owning deities of the area. Dependence on their continuing goodwill is brought out by the myths of first arrival and settlement, and recapitulated in the ritual symbolism with its offerings of food and drink and incense, its statements of dependence and pleas for protection.

Protection and dependence suggest by analogy another set of relationships which also figure in the ritual symbolism - those of the household and immediate kin group, the junior members owing the duty of obedience to the head of the household in return for their keep and a share in the patrimony. These household relationships are recreated in the ritual in the form of the controlling power of the Birth-god over his 'children', the capricious local demons who can interfere with the agricultural and seasonal cycle among other things. The

strategy which informs this type of ritual and gives rise to its symbolism is to elicit the protection of the local gods by binding them in the same web of relationships that join together households, villages, and farmers with their landowners. Considered as one-to-one relations the inferior partner is disadvantaged in having no real means of coercing or enforcing the superior's obligations. The only sanction lies in the appeal to the next higher authority right up to the king himself if need be. Thus this segment of the supernatural world rapidly assumes the same hierarchical features of more and more inclusive control which characterise the feudal system.

Because kin and household groups and their associated land rights also set up divisions between social groups, rituals of this type have the potential not just to recreate traditional authority on the pattern of familiar relationships but to throw into relief or emphasise existing social tensions. The Teba clan's reluctance to fulfil the duties of the tribal priest vested in it, and their preference for Buddhist ritual, contrasted with the Shangba clan's insistence on resorting to a non-Buddhist clan ceremony, are evidently connected with a changing balance of power in which the latter has lost influence in village affairs to the former. Although in other contexts the Shangbas are as devoted Buddhists as any other group in the village, the particular symbolic setting of the birth-god ceremonies and their association with the founding of the village provide an ideal idiom to re-emphasise the Shangba's special status.

The second ritual stratagem is particularly associated with exorcistic rites (Chapter 5). Here the problem of efficacy is of special relevance - how do the participants believe the rites effect a cure and how do they in fact work, if indeed they do? Common to one broad strand of thought has been the idea that rituals work by affecting the minds of the participants, either directly by bringing about a personal transformation akin to that undergone in psychoanalysis, or indirectly by restructuring the actors' social experience (1). Here I suggest that the underlying procedures in exorcisms can be understood in different terms: the participants intend them to change the world - i.e. to entrap and drive out attacking demons - and the procedures they adopt are designed to achieve this; but what in fact happens is that the ritual redefines the condition of the participants through a second but entirely homologous set of procedures. The ritual is effective but the participants mistakenly

attribute its efficacy to the first rather than the second set of procedures.

The exorcistic ritual, whether Buddhist or shamanic, exhibits a standard form: the use of offerings as a blandishment to the attacking demons coupled with threats of force by the familiars/protectors to ensure their attendance, the use of a structure to imprison the demons and as a vehicle to compel their departure. The ritual symbolism does not, for the participants, consist merely of symbols - for they are actually taken to participate in the identity of the thing symbolised, so that to act upon the symbol is to act directly upon the thing symbolised. By creating a relationship of identity between the ritual forum and the supernatural world the ritual becomes a simulacrum for the forces of good and evil at large and it then proceeds by a mimetic enactment of the results it aims to achieve. It is an example of the operative ceremony or performative act to which a certain amount of anthropological attention, stemming from Austin's work on speech acts, has been directed (Tambiah, 1973; Bloch, 1974; Skorupski, 1976). The mimesis is articulated through a number of channels: the use of models (tomas, world axes, vehicles) which are analogues for the supernatural forces, the cosmos, the offerings, the mode of transport ascribed to demons and so on; a repetitive, formalised use of drumming, chanting and dancing - restricted codes in which logical meaning is subordinated to the compulsion of fixed routines; and the performative use of words in which saying a thing under the appropriate conditions - 'I command you to depart', 'I dedicate this water to holy Ama Ganga' etc. - is sufficient to bring it about.

However, the performative words and actions of the exorcism form only part of the ritual performance which also contains 'perlocutionary' features in which saying (or doing) something has consequences for the subject, whether intended or not (Tambiah, op cit). The perlocutionary features of Tamang exorcism stem from the view that the client's abnormality is not his - for it is externalised as an attack for which he is not responsible. But to identify and act upon these supernatural aggressors is also by definition to act upon the person by defining the nature of his complaint and transforming him back to his original state of well-being. The ritual is also a social passage for the client in which his affliction becomes a socially defined abnormality in terms of an ideology of affliction. He is then moved from

this state of abnormality back to the normal by an authoritative specialist in a process which, as Stirrat (1977) has pointed out, is akin to the three stages which correspond with those identified by van Gennep in rites of passage - rites of separation, rites of transition and rites of incorporation or aggregation. Such rites do not merely symbolise changes in status but actually effect them, changing the actual person while ostensibly manipulating demons.

Corresponding to the first phase of separation is the onset of the illness in which the sufferer is progressively marked out as non-ordinary, aberrant, increasingly unable to carry out his normal social roles. He no longer 'feels himself' and may come to be seen as a threat or danger to others. At this stage divination is employed which not only acts to give social recognition to the client's condition as abnormal, ill or possessed but also defines his condition and places it within a cultural schema, rendering the unknown and threatening intelligible and comparable with other known processes.

The exorcistic core of the performance corresponds to the liminal phase, in which the sufferer's own fear and confusion are brought under control by the operation of a specialist who, having classified the problem and placed it within a context of generally accepted theories of affliction, operates on the supposed causative agents, separating them from their victim, bringing them under his own control and then expelling them. Finally in the period of re-incorporation the specialist increases the life-power of the client either by anointment with ritually empowered substances or by the provision of amulets, protective threads etc. and returns him to his place as a full member of society again. This re-incorporation is symbolised, for example, by the Buddhist lama's application of barley flour to the participants in the courtyard of the house after an exorcism and the shouts of 'may the gods triumph' which bear public witness to the sufferer's return to normality.

The same process may be seen at work in communal exorcisms where there is no single patient. Here the community as a whole is defined by qualified specialists as being under attack and is separated from its normal condition. The liminal phase is characterised by the outbreak of pandemonium during the scaring away of the demons and finally the communal meal eaten at the gumpa symbolises the return of the whole community to its normal state under the protection of Buddhism, purged of the dangers which threatened it.

The very widespread use of exorcism suggests that it cannot be fully understood either as a form of psychotherapeutic abreaction (not applicable to communal exorcisms or performances in which the patient plays a minimal role), or as a means of resolving social and cultural problems (not applicable to organic complaints). The ritual 'works' (for us) not because it has compelled the demons to depart by recourse to performative words and deeds but because it has effected a social transformation which defines the person as anomalous in terms of an ideology of affliction and then restores him to normality. However, a social transformation is not likely to do much to cure an organic complaint. The exorcistic ritual, it is true, is likely to be most beneficial in the case of psychosomatic ailments (which may indeed result from family and community tensions) or 'mental illness', not because it is a form of psychotherapy but because both exorcism and psychotherapy can be seen as examples of a more general underlying process in the treatment of illness whether by medicine or magic in which specialists define, treat and then restore patients to normality in accordance with a particular social ideology. The importance of this procedure can be seen in the well-known 'placebo effect' in which even some apparently organic complaints can be ameliorated merely by conducting the patient through the various stages of treatment without actually providing chemotherapy. The benefits in terms of intelligibility and social recognition which any authoritative specialist can provide should not be underestimated.

Horton has identified manipulation and communion as two poles of a continuum along which some sorts of human and human-supernatural relationships may fall (op cit: 212). The two strategies considered so far in Tamang protective and exorcistic rituals tend towards the manipulative pole, designed to win health and security from the gods. The two final strategies discussed in connection with offering rituals tend more towards the pole of communion. Unlike the former which were overtly concerned with acting instrumentally on the world in order to effect changes in the participants' lives, these rituals are directly designed to change the participants themselves - to alter their status in terms of the moral rather than the social world either by imparting divine power or divine love, the high deities here embodying the cosmic qualities which can overcome the suffering to which men are heir as a result of their position in the karmic round of rebirths.

But whereas there is no way of buying or coercing divine love and compassion, which can only be evoked by arousing pity, there are - as other rituals have suggested - alternative means of gaining divine power. And in the first group of offering rituals, the monthly temple ceremonies, the communion aspect has to some extent been subverted, 'deseccated' as Horton puts it, by a strong streak of manipulative intent in which the emphasis is more on obtaining the power of the gods in the form of 'nectar' or 'life attainment' than on encouraging the communion of worshippers and divinity. The ritual symbolism still powerfully retains the original thrust of uniting the two through the sexual symbolism of generation and transformation but the union is now largely confined to the officiants with the worshippers taking a passive part. The officiants through their union with the gods are able to mediate the attainment of life for their congregation. The ritual stratagem has something of the bargaining process, in which the presentation of lavish offerings is used to create an obligation on the gods to impart some of their divine wisdom. The worshippers' part of the bargain is to make themselves fit to receive the sacred power through supporting Buddhism - living in accordance with its precepts and doing their religious duty.

Finally the rituals of fasting approach most closely to the communion pole of activity. Here it is not so much the offerings which are significant as the privations and hardships which the worshippers undergo by their fasting and silence which symbolise their rejection of gross physical and social demands in the attempt to unite with Chenrezi. Compelled by this display of devotion he responds with his compassion and divine assistance by helping the worshippers to achieve heaven when they die. Just as the symbolism of offering rituals reverses that of exorcisms, so they may ^{be} seen as another species of rites of passage. This time the participants are defined as lacking something which they need or ought to have - wisdom or compassion, the assistance of the deities. It is the participants, not the world, who have changed during the period of separation, re-emerging afterwards to take up their normal social roles redefined as blessed by their intercourse with the gods.

Nearly ninety years ago Vansittart noted that Buddhism in Nepal was being steadily supplanted by Hinduism and predicted that "before another century it will have entirely disappeared" (1894: 239). Such a situation has not yet come to pass among the Tamangs of this part

of northern Nepal where Buddhism is still the dominant ideology, providing the fundamental explanatory principles concerning the human predicament and the means of emancipation from it. But the most interesting developments in terms of religious dynamics concern what I have termed the traditional complex - attempts to explain, regulate and deal with immediate concerns. It is here that the three cornered competition between Buddhism, Hinduism and shamanism is being played out. The use of Buddhist protector deities and Buddhist rituals with a distinctive approach to deal with the instrumental needs of the community has, in one respect at least, bid fair to establish a Buddhist hegemony. The methodology of Buddhist protective ritual puts it in direct opposition to that of the worship of the ancestral and local deities by the householder and the tribal priest, leading to the steady eclipse of their active role in religious affairs.

Meanwhile the shamans act as the harbingers of Hinduism through their capacity to familiarise their communities with Hindu deities of all-Nepal provenance. The methods they employ for exorcism and divination are no different from those offered by Buddhism. The competition is solely in terms of Buddhist versus shamanic power, the former trading on its prestige as the proponent of universal values, the latter on its ability to deal directly with the local gods through ecstasy and possession.

In respect of the universal complex Buddhism still retains its supremacy and has nothing to fear from a recrudescence of shamanic influence, which even by incorporating Hindu deities is unable to generate a comprehensively universal approach. But the infiltration of Hindu ideas via the traditional complex is a reminder that were Buddhist authority to wane in the area an alternative ideology with a similar capacity to express universalistic values stands in readiness - one which, moreover, might be seen as carrying the advantage of linking the Tamangs more strongly to the wider Nepalese society. So far there has been no move by leaders of Tamang opinion to tone down or harmonise their Buddhism with Hindu Nepalese culture in the way that other more dynamic and entrepreneurial tribal groups have done. On the contrary, their response has been to re-emphasise the common Buddhist heritage of the 'Bhote' group of which they form a part. Their continuing intermarriage with the priestly clan is both a disincentive for Hinduisation and an indication of continuing con-

fidence in the security of their Buddhist identity. With their dominant social position, the trust of the rest of the community and the ability to make their voices heard in the political institutions of Nepal, it seems that Buddhism is likely to continue to influence at least this section of the hill people, and that Vansittart's prediction will be unfulfilled.

Notes to Chapter 9

(1) An example of work drawing directly on the psychoanalytic tradition is provided by Peters' study of Tamang shamanism, conducted in an area apparently dominated by Hinduism rather than Buddhism. He views the main psychotherapeutic agent in the ritual as the catharsis of the patient (1978: 79), achieved through the intense crisis experience generated by the rite; this helps to promote personal growth and to provide channels to ventilate aggression and guilt while in a situation of conflict. Peters also emphasizes the importance of placing the patient's symptoms and feelings within a conceptual framework which helps to reduce anxiety by converting chaos to order (ibid: 82). He further develops the account by noting the importance of certain key cultural symbols which condense within them a variety of meanings which are manipulated by the shaman; the symbol serves "as a guide or vehicle for the reorganization of the emotions released during the traumatic abreactive experience" (ibid: 85-6).

Peters considers at length a case in which the patient, trapped in an interpersonal conflict, does indeed appear to go through an intense experience of possession and subsequent release (catharsis). However, it would be difficult to apply his approach satisfactorily in the present case for two reasons: firstly, in none of the curing ceremonies I observed was there any indication that the patient was possessed or 'worked through' any sort of crisis experience - indeed he often played a rather minimal role in the ceremony; secondly, Peters does not discuss the use of these same rituals in cases where there is clearly (to us) a physiological disturbance - would not the persistent failure of catharsis and abreaction to influence this eventually lead to a loss of faith in its efficacy?

G L O S S A R Y - P A R T I

(in English alphabetical order)

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
ajo	a-jo	elder brother	84
amrt (N)		nectar, ambrosia of the gods	205
ancaal (N)		administrative zone	40
ashang	a-zhang	uncle (MB, MZH)	84
athārajāt (N)		18 lower status clans of the eastern Tamangs	13
bādā-hākim (N)		district governor	118
baku		half-sleeved woollen jacket	56
bāle shem-pa		marriage gifts to bride's parents	94
bal-sing		marriage by abduction	91
bāma		marriage	90
ban (N)		forest	60
banrājā (N)		forest deity	60
bā-pa	'bab-pa	to shake, as in trance	154
bārajāt (N)		12 higher status clans of the eastern Tamangs	13
bardo	bar-do	intermediate state between death and rebirth	138
bā-weh		bride's marriage clothes	92
beyul	sbas-yul	mythical hidden land	64
bhaīsi (N)		water buffalo	69
bhikṣu (N)		monk	217
bich		type of bark used in divination	144
biu (N)		seed	109
boksi (N)		witch	95
bol-tor	'bul-gtor	gift torma	124
bombo	bon-po	shaman	14
bombo-sha		female shaman/shaman's wife	154
bong-mar		type of bark used in divination	144
boḍ (N)		election, vote	98
bu	dbugs	breath	137
buzau		brideprice	92
cārjāt (N)		4 high status Gurung clans	77
cār-dān (N)		prestations accompanying marriage request	90
cākari (N)		attendance on high official to elicit patronage	134

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
cham	'cham	sacred dance depicting victory of gods over demons	164
che-pa	mchod-pa	offering (<u>phyi-mchod</u> - outer, <u>nang-mchod</u> - inner offering)	27
chö-kyong	chos-skyong	protector deities	124
chö-ten	mchod-rten	stupa, Buddhist reliquary	45
chö-ti	chos-khri	household Buddhist altar	61
chö-tor	mchod-gtor	offering tormas	124
chö-wang	chos-dbang	blessing	218
chor-patra (N)		document recording a divorce	96
chu-da dopta	chu-thag (-)	mill	59
chu-sa	chu-gza'	water demon	141
churpe	phyur-ba	dried cheese	64
da-dar	mda'-dar	trident or arrow with cloth streamers used in a variety of rituals	81
dal	gral	row, rank	121
damāi (N)		caste of tailors	59
damaru	damaru	double sided hand drum	121
dam-chen	dam-can	oath-bound protectors of Buddhism	131
dangbo dangbo tampe	dang-po gnam-dpe	stories of long ago, myths	163
dar-chö	dar-lcog	prayer flag	157
dawa	zla-ba	moon	147
dhāmi (N)		spirit medium	14
dhārni (N)		measurement of weight, = 5 lbs	58
diku	gri-gug	lama's magic chopper	126
din-dö	dod-'gro	(realm of) animal existence	184
do	mdos	thread-cross	158
dom-shing		bier	233
dorje	rdo-rje	diamond sceptre, lama's ritual implement	121
du		manure	52
dü	bdud	anti-religious demons	116
dudh kund (N)		milk lake	112
dukha (N)		suffering	182
dün-dze	bdun-tshigs	ceremony performed at seven day intervals after death	242
dung	dung	conch shell trumpet	121
dungal	sdug-bsngal	suffering	183
dzomo	mdzo-mo	yak-cow crossbreed	56

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
dzong	rdzong	fort, castle	42
dzogġ /yogi		yogi, wandering ascetic	159
gang	sgang	hill, ridge, section of village	48
gang-ri	gangs-ri	(snowy) mountain	60
gang-ta	?gangs-rta	'abominable snowman'	60
gom	sgom	deep meditation	222
gompa	dgon-pa	village temple	40
gon-po	mgon-po	high ranking Buddhist protector gods	121
goru (N)		ox	109
goth (N)		cowshed, temporary cattle herder's dwelling	48
graha (N)		enemy demon	151
gur		effigy of dead person	243
guru (N)		religious teacher	151
guru bumba	gu-ru bum-pa	'flask of the guru', a partic- ularly sacred chö-ten (q v)	63
gyek(-tor)	bgegs(-gtor)	(torma for) hindering demons	122
gyewa	dge-ba	concluding feast of death ceremony	190
hal (N)		area ploughed in a day by a pair of oxen, about half an acre	52
hruisang cyopke		the legendary 18 Tamang clans	76
hvai		genealogy of the Tamangs	93
jāgir (N)		land granted in recognition of government or military service	39
jāgirdār (N)		holder of jāgir land	39
jal-pa	mjal-ba	to pay homage	27
janaipurnimā (N)		sacred thread ceremony at full moon in August	205
jang-ba	spyang-pu	name card of dead person	243
jānne mānche (N)		Nepalese healer	163
jāri-muta		adultery	96
jāt (N)		caste or tribe	76
jhākri (N)		shaman, diviner	199
jhipda	gzhi-bdag	local god, place-owner	108
jillā (N)		district	40
jimmāwāl (N)		sub-district collector	118
jinda	sbyin-bdag	sponsor of rituals	158
jinsa	sbyin(-sreg?)	burnt offering, offerings plac- ed on funeral pyre	236

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
jo-mo	jo-mo	woman, consort of shamans	151
jungwa-nga	'byung-wa lnga	the five elements	136
jutho (N)		polluted food	169
kāmi (N)		caste of blacksmiths	59
kando(ma)	mkha 'gro(ma)	dākini, sky-goer, embodiment of knowledge	121
kang-tor	bskang-gtor	an offering of bodily organs	124
kar-che		white offering, type of shaman	201
kar-khung	skar-khung	window	61
ke-lha	skye-lha	birth-god, ancestral deity	77
ke-tip	skye-sgrib	birth pollution	137
ken		wife's father	84
ken syangbo		wife-giving lineage	84
kha-be-pa		divorce	95
khāngi (N)		emolument of government servant	39
kharka (N)		meadow, pasture land	60
kharu		foodgrain, barley	53
khimse	khyim-mtshes	neighbour	63
khorsāni (N)		chillies	54
kipat (N)		system of land tenure where rights are invested in the clan	13
klap		ox	52
klap mō-pa		to plough	52
kla-pa		to expel, throw out	27
kle		field	60
kodo (N)		millet, eleusine coracana	53
kola		child/children	114
koma mar-ti		red dye from plant root	123
konyer	dkon-gnyer	sacristan, incumbent of gumpa	211
kor-pa	bskor-ba	to go round, circumambulate	27
krang-pa		to burn, cremate	236
khokri (N)		curved Nepali knife	87, 121
kupa	lkugs-pa	mute, day of silence during nyung-ne (q v)	187
kurim	sku-rim	locally, type of protection ceremony involving exorcism	65
kusho	sku-zhabs	honourific term of address	218
kyu		sheep	56

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
la	bla	soul	140
la tenkin		shamanic ritual for bringing back the soul	145
lāj (N)		shame, embarrassment	247
lama	bla-ma	part-time Buddhist priest; literally, 'superior one'	15
lamdin	lam-'dren	guide, waycloth for leading the corpse to cremation ground	234
lang	glang	ox	151
lanyi wop-kyel		eclipse of the moon	141
lemba		dumbness, cretinism	137
lenghin		shaman's spirit assistants	151
le-ye		shaman's songs	163
lha	lha	god	30
lha bñn') lha tapke }		non-ecstatic tribal religious specialist	114
lha-ma-yin	lha-ma-yin	(realm of)the asuras, titans or demi-gods	184
lha söl	lha-gsol	supplication, esp. worship of ke-lha (q v)	107
lha wang-pa		to be possessed by a god	136
liṅga (N)		phallus, phallic emblem	115
ling-a	ling-ga	torma in the form of a man	125
lopen	slob-dpon	teacher, chief lineage lama	187
lopi		good deeds	137
lo-sar	lo-gsar	Tibetan New Year	65
lñ	klu	nāg, water sprite	30
lung-ta	rlung-rta	life force, lit. 'wind horse'	122
lut(-tor)	glud(-gtor)	scapegoat, substitute or ransom torma	152
mā		daughter's/sister's husband	86
ma-bñn	dmag-bon	shaman's deities, the army of Bon	151
mā gomma	(mag-pa)	uxorilocal marriage	80
mahilā saṅgāṭan (N)		women's organisation	99
makai (N)		maize	53
manḍ	ma-mo	female demon	158
māna (N)		measure of volume = 1 lb	114
māno		Buddhist devotional songs	163
mani	ma-ni	walls, flags etc with Buddhist inscriptions	64
māng		ghost, demon	149

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
mar-che	dmar-mchod	red offering, type of shaman	201
mar-kung	mar-()	butter stored in goatskin	56
matwāli (N)		'drinking' castes, lower castes/ tribes ranked above untouchables	11
mayōl	smad-gyogs	shaman's costume, skirt	153
me-me	mes-mes	grandfather, ancestor, term of respect to older man	89
mehto	me-tog	lamas' annual begging round	220
men	sman	medicine	166
mendo	me-tog	flower	53
me-sa		fire demon	141
miā-pāli		weapons, bow and arrow	238
mi-kha	mi-kha	gossip, backbiting- literally, man-mouth	139
mil-sing		love match, marriage after elopement	91
mi-ne	mi-gnas	the human world	184
mit/mitini (N)		ritual brother/sister	81
mīa mendo		white rhododendron	112
modé		soya	53
mohar (N)		half rupee coin	114
mo-tel		women's section of house	61
mrap		threshold, doorway	63
mukhiyā (N)		village headman	98
mulā (N)		radish	54
muri (N)		measure of volume = 160 lbs	52
mu-tsi		shamanic prophecy	144
myū-pa	myos-pa	to be mad	136
nāg (N)		water sprite, lū (q v)	30
nag-po		black shaman	201
nam-nam		oilseed	53
namsa		village	60
nam-she	rnam-shes	soul, consciousness principle	138
nā-pa		to be ill	136
na-pum		egg, chicken	56
ne-bar		death ceremony during bardo (q v) period	242
nga	nga	drum	121
nga-gyel	nga-rgyal	divine ego of deity	127
ngak-pa	sngags-pa	magician priest	211

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
ngo-tö	ngo-sprod	ceremony of reading Bardo Thödol	242
ningu		local beer	79
ni-pa		to go	208
nor-kal	nor-skal	dowry of jewellery etc	92
nyel-mo		see gang-ta	
nyelwa	dmyal-ba	hell	184
nyima	nyi-ma	sun	147
nyingji	nying-rje	compassion, love	177
nyung-ne	smyung-gnas	three day festival including day of silence and fasting	65
ordiche		'thank you, bravo'	94
pal-tor	dpal-gtor	principal tormā for deity	166
pañcāyat (N)		administrative village	40
pāp (N)		sin	137
parhi/padhne (N)		instructed or 'reading' (lama)	210
par pung-pa		to print (a prayer flag etc)	247
pāthi (N)		measure of volume = 8 lbs	220
patra (N)		almanac, calendar	144
pawo zor	dpa'-bo zor	type of tormā	124
phalphul (N)		fruit	109
pha-myung		agnatic kin	79
pharsi (N)		pumpkin	53
pha-shi dopta	pha-gzhis (-)	co-inheritors	79
phe-bön		instructed, non-lineage shaman	201
pho-tel		men's section of the house	61
phuk garne (N)		to blow mantras	163
phurba	phur-pa	magic dagger used in ritual	112
pradhān (N)		elected head of pañcāyat (q v)	40
prasād (N)		offering of food to deity subsequently consumed by worshippers	169
pro		illegitimate child	80
pujā (N)		worship, religious ritual	168
pungbo	phung-po	the body including its cognitive functions	233
rā		goat	56
raikar (N)		state-owned land in which peasants have rights	39
rāja (N)		king	202
raksi (N)		distilled liquor	79
rakta (ragat)	rak-ta (Sk)	blood	166

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
rang-shin	rang-bzhin	self-evolved (shaman)	200
rudrāchhe māḷā (N)		shaman's beads	153
ri rab	ri-rab	world axis, Mount Sumeru	159
ri-nga	rigs lnga	5 sided lama's headdress	234
rig-dsin (gyū-phe)	rig-'dzin	shaman's ancestors, lineage of Heroes	151
rol-mo	rol-mo	cymbals	121
ropsa		funeral meal	236
sadag	sa-bdag	class of demons, masters of the earth	117
samdhi-sha		cross-cousins, marriageable affines	84
sang-dung		soothsayer, minor healer	143
saṅkrānti (N)		bi-annual Nepali festival	68
santān (N)		family	109
sem	sems	mind, consciousness	138
sem-so	sems gso(-ba)	sympathy offering at funeral	233
serkim	gser-skyems	'gold libation', offering of liquor and incense	116
sha	sha	(1) flesh, meat (2) matrilineal relatives	84
shalse	zhal-zas	food torma	125
shang shang rol-mo	gshang-gshang rol-mo	shaman's necklace of bells	153
shelba	zhal-'bag	Buddhist dancers' masks	159
shel-kar	zhal-dkar	drink offered to person of high status	90
sherab	shes rab	wisdom	177
shinde	gshi-'dre	demon associated with undeparted dead	30
shingum	zhing-khams	heaven	184
shing-sa	shing-gza)	wood demon	60
shing-sang	shing-gsang	funeral pyre	235
shi-tip	gshi-sgrib	death pollution	79
shiwa	zhi-ba	peaceful deities	120
shukpa	shug-'pa	juniper	116
shume		wife's mother	84
śiśya (N)		pupil	198
söl-pa	gsol-pa	to supplicate	27
sonam	bsod-nams	merit	220
sönde	gson-'dre	witch	139
sorajāt (N)		16 low status Gurung clans	77

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
śramadān (N)		corvée, communal labour	98
sungma	srung-ma	protector gods	121
syāma		women's woollen backcloth	56
tal-sing		(marriage) by arrangement	90
tam	gtam	word, language	8
tamba		poet, genealogist, teller of hvai (q v)	93
tamra		haricot beans	54
taruni (N)		teenagers, young people	207
teme		potato	53
ten	rten	vessel, container	218
thaili (N)		small bag, pouch	110
thanka	thang-ka	religious painting, banner	234
thar (N)		clan	76
thari		hereditary (lama)	211
thin		corpse	236
ti	khri	bed	61
tihm	? khyim	house	60
tikā (N)		ritual marks on forehead	68
tip	sgrib	pollution	79
tiro (N)		land tax	98
tiwār/tihār (N)		Nepali festival	68
tohka		wild pig	54
tōi	thod	shaman's headdress	153
toknu (N)		to bite	139
torma	gtor-ma	dough or rice object functioning as representation of, embodiment of and offering to gods, used in variety of ritual contexts	112
towa	khro-ba	fierce deities	120
triśul (N)		trident	205
tsam	mtshams	lama's retreat, meditation	189
tsa-tang	tsha-grang	hot and cold (hells)	184
tse-chu	tshes-bcu	monthly Buddhist ritual	68
tse-tup	tshe-sgrub	life torma, the attainment of life	116
tsi	rtsis	divination	27
tso	tshogs	offering of food to gods subsequently consumed by worshippers	166 237
tsō-ru	gtsod-(?rwa)	antelope horn used by shaman	153

<u>Tamang/Nepali</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Page</u>
tsu-shin		shaman taught by gods	200
tulku	sprul-sku	emanation body, reincarnate lama	209
yak	g.yag	bos grunniens	56
yapse	g.yabs	house verandah	63
yidah	yi-dwags	(realm of) pretas, hungry ghosts	184
yidam	yi-dam	patron deity	121
yul-lha	yul-lha	country god, village god	114

G L O S S A R Y - P A R T I I

<u>Name in text</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	
Chenrezi	spyan-ras-gzigs	(Avalokiteśvara)
Dabla	dgra-lha	
Dakar	brag-dkar	
Do-mang	mdo-mang gzung-bsdus	
Dorje Chang	rdo-rje chang	(Vajradhāra)
Dorje Phamo	rdo-rje phag-mo	(Vajrayogini)
Gelug-pa	dge lug-pa	
Gonpo Chazhi	ngon-po phyag-bzhi	(Mahākāla as the Four-Handed Lord)
Guru Dragpo	gu-ru drag-po	
Guru Rinpoche	gu-ru rin-po-che	(Padmasambhava)
Gyelbo Ku-nga	ngyal-bo sku-lnga	(Five Kings)
Hevajra	dgyes-pa rdor	
Jitsen Dölma	rje-tsun sgröl-ma	(Tara)
Kahgyur	bka'-gyur	
Kargyud-pa	bka'-gyud-pa	
Karma-pa	karma-pa	
Khorlo Demchog	'khor-lo lde-mchog	(Cakrasamvara)
Konchok Chi-du	dkon-mchog spyi-dus	(Union of Precious Ones)
Kye-tong-pa	brgyad-stong-pa	
Kyirong	skyid-grong	
Langtang	glang-thang	
Lhaba Duchen	lha-babs dus-chen	
Milarepa	mi-la ras-pa	
Nyingma-pa	rnying-ma-pa	
Nyi-thi	nyi-khri	
Opame	'od-dpag-med	(Amitābha)
Palten Lhamo	dpal-ldan lha-mo	
Pe har	pe-har	
Ri-sum Gonpo	rigs-gsum ngon-po	(Three Lords)
Sandi	za-'dre	
Sa-skyapa	sa-skyapa	
Senge Dongchen	seng-ge gdong-chen	
Senge Dongma	seng-ge gdong-ma	
Shakya Tuba	shakya thub-pa	(Buddha)

<u>Name in text</u>	<u>Tibetan</u>	
Shang Karpo	tshangs dkar-po	(Brahma)
Shinje Chöki Gyelbo	gshin-rje chos-kyi rgyal-po	(Yamantāka)
Tashi Lhunpo	bkra-shis lhun-po	
Thuji Chenpo	thugs-rje chen-po	(Avalokiteśvara)
Trashigang	bkra-shis sgang	
Tsering-nga	tse-ring mched-nga	(Five Longlife Sisters)
Tukpa Tse-zhi	drug-pa tshes-bzhi	
Yum	yum	
Za	gza	
Zor	zor	(Magic Weapon Torma)

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