BUNGAMATI
The life world of a Newar Community explored through
the natural and social life of water.

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Chapter 1

1  INTRODUCTION

“That part of the real world on which we as anthropologists need to focus, is composed of this widest compass: a natural world, a human population with all its collective and statistical social features, and a set of cultural ideas in terms of which people try to understand and cope with themselves and their habitat”, (Barth 1987, 87). It is the world of people living in a small town called Bungamati located in the Kathmandu valley that I am attempting to describe and analyze in this thesis.

As students, many of us desperately search for advises on procedures of collecting appropriate data that is needed for writing a successful thesis. However, the reality we are trying to grasp seems to be constituted in such a way that standard procedures for data collection are unlikely to automatically catch the interplay of cultural premises, and social and ecological interdependence, which shape the “lived world” of the people we study. In my opinion, investigation of this interplay has some similarity to a detective investigating a crime. The investigator assumes the position of actors possibly having participated in the case investigated. Success in doing so will unavoidably be affected by the investigator’s intuitive capacity to imagine what actors are up to, and what traces of meaning and causality their doings and sayings may contain. Such intuition is affected both by the investigator’s understanding of “the nature of crime” or in this case, the nature of social life and cultural meaning constructed, as well as by the investigator’s personal background. Considering the last point, there have been some debates on the advantages and disadvantages of being a cultural “insider” or a cultural “outsider” to the people studied. Some claim that a cultural insider will “see” the world through “glasses” constructed on the same cultural principles as the people studied and consequently will take these principles for granted and not question them or even “see” them. Others claim that a cultural outsider will be so biased by one’s own culture that one will not be able to grasp adequately the complexities and levels of meanings communicated in peoples’ doings and sayings. I have no problem in seeing that there are some truths in both these positions. Consequently I assume that there will be distortions of both kinds in our interpretations of what is going on among the people we study. The question is where, and how, do these distortions affect our investigations?  I find Rudner’s (1966)
distinction between context of discovery and context of validation useful for clarifying
my position on this issue. I think that the baggage that I bring to the investigation belongs
to the “context of discovery” i.e. the context, which deals with conditions stimulating me
to develop particular hypotheses. To this context belongs questions about how the
hypotheses I latch on to are affected by my personality, my cultural biases, and my
theoretical orientations as well as questions about the extent to which social, economic,
political and academic conditions are conducive to pursuing particular kinds of research.
An important part of anthropological fieldwork belongs to this context of discovery. It
consists in exposing oneself to experiences which make one wonder about the way
people “present themselves” in daily life - experiences which may serve to make one
aware of distortions in one's own cultural glasses whether distortion are caused by the
cultural biases of an insider or an outsider. The extent to which I manage to expose
myself to such experiences depends on how I, in Sperber’s (1985) words, manage to link
up with people in daily interaction.
To the context of validations, belongs questions relevant for the rejection or acceptance
of my hypotheses. Such questions deal with the empirical evidence I have brought in to
support my hypotheses as well as the theoretical assumptions I use in my reasoning on
the evidence.
If I look at my own position in light of the debate in anthropology about the merits of
being an insider or outsider, I find it difficult to give a clear answer. I can follow Daniel
Linger’s argument that personal biography and own concern shape both my fieldwork
and this thesis; “moreover the shaping has been, I believe, in important respects
unconscious, unknowable to me even in my most relentless reflexive moments” (quoted
in Steven M. Parish 1994).
In many ways, the people of Bungamati are very close to me in the sense that they live in
a settlement located only 3 km from my house where I have lived for about 10 years. I
have, during this period, shared buses and taxis with them when going to the towns of
Kathmandu Valley like Patan and Kathmandu. I can communicate with them in the same
language, Nepali, although most of the people of Bungamati speak Newari as their
mother tongue; Newari is a language I am not at all conversant in, although I understand
a few words. Moreover, over the years, I have developed stereotypical images of what
Newars “are like”—stereotyping which in some respects I think I share with many other non-Newar Nepalese. Although there are great differences among Newaris we take our impression of high caste Newaris as representing the whole group. Personally, I have thought of the Newars as ‘they’ in contrast to a rather ill defined and imagined ‘we’ I identify with; I tend to think about them in terms of features—features which seem to be different from the people I identify with. The Newars stand out to us as rather special – in many ways they seem to make a point of being different from the rest of us even to the extent of keeping interaction with the larger Nepali society to a minimum; they strike me as urban - in a strange way, similar to what the nuns in St.Joseph’s Girls High school, Shillong, India, told me about how the Greek city states were like with their pride in the civilization of their own particular city. They are the producers of the arts and crafts that foreigners admire when they come to Nepal; their political elite play a dominant role in the politics of the country, and their trading castes are considered very clever bargainers. Such rather contradictory impressions of the “Newar” provides a fertile ground for cultural stereotyping -- arrogant, shrewd, communal, but also artistic. With such biases in my cultural baggage I am in many respects, an outsider; though my fieldwork has corrected some of them (I hope), plenty may still exist.

As to the experiences, which have shaped the culture in terms of which I understand “my world”, act in it, and communicate about it, I will mention just a few points of my biography which I consider important in this context. My jat (The Nepali term jat I find more adequate than the term jat because of the rather different meanings the word jat have in anthropological literature) is “Gurung”; being categorized as belonging to this identity has important consequences for my position in many sectors of activity in Nepal. I do not speak the Gurung language because I have never lived in a community where the so-called Gurung “culture” is a living tradition. Our family, like many Gurungs, has generations of army service both in Indian and British regiments. Most of my family members, starting from my great grandfathers or even earlier have served both the Indian and the British army, and have been posted to various places in India and several ex-British colonies. A good number of my relatives on both sides of my parents have settled in India and they occasionally visit Nepal. Though some have returned to Nepal there are several others who are still living in India.
I spent most of my childhood and early youth in Shillong, the capital of Meghalaya, a northeastern state of India. In terms of experiences, which have shaped my cultural outlook, I consider this the most important formative period. Though the majority of my peers were Khasis, they also included members of other Indian communities. I am still quite fluent in the Khasi language (a language belonging to the Mon-Khmer branch of the Austro-Asiatic language family) and have a fairly good understanding of many other aspects of Khasi culture. The cultural values of my Nepali family did not allow me to practice many aspects of Khasi culture that I had assimilated. My exposure to “Khasi culture” had a long-lasting influence on values that I cherish and in many ways makes me critical of some aspects of life as I experience it in Nepal. Another important formative experience in Shillong was the impact of the schooling system. I went to a convent school (St. Joseph’s Girls High School) and college (St. Mary’s College). Because the medium of instruction was English in both these educational institutions, I acquired good fluency in the English language and had quite a broad reading of English literature.

After settling in Nepal, the most important event that developed my cultural outlook was my position as an administrative secretary in the NUFU funded Tribhuvan-Bergen Human Ecology Program in the year 1993. An important part of my job was to help Nepali student participants in their work, especially with the usage of computer and the English language. Through this interaction with the students I became interested in anthropology and I tried to further develop my understanding and interest in the subject matter via reading of anthropology books in the Program library as well as discussions with Norwegian participants in the Program. As an employee in the Norwegian project, I had the chance to participate in the International Summer School at the University of Oslo for three summer sessions, and acquired a basic knowledge of Norwegian in addition to familiarizing myself with the classics of Norwegian literature. I also became familiar with the Norwegian system of examination - a system that with its emphasis on independent thinking contrasted dramatically with the Nepali or Indian educational system, which places more emphasis on memorization.

The question thus arises: Does this biography make me an insider or an outsider among the people of Bungamati? On the background of the experiences that I have internalized as “my culture”, it seems reasonable to consider myself as an outsider in my relation to
my neighbours whose experiences must have led to internalization of cultural contents rather different from mine. However, when I did my fieldwork I had the strange feeling of being surprised by features of life that seemed both new as well as familiar. I felt that there might be some common deeper lying levels of culture, which serve to establish some kind of link between my internalized culture, and the culture manifested in the sayings and doings among people in Bungamati. If so, I may be considered in some respects, a cultural insider, although the difference in jat identity between the people of Bungamati and myself could never make me a social insider. Furthermore, my position as a fieldworker was heavily influenced by my gender, particularly since I was more involved interviewing men in public fora than women in private contexts.

In Nepal, we live in a “life-world” where it is of primary importance to manage our interactions with other human beings. The way we manage this interaction affects one of our primary concerns, namely the state of our ritual purity and pollution. The idea of difference is basic in our relation to each other - we differ with regards to inherited ritual rank, gender, age, and we use the term jat to refer to such differentiation in social life as well as to other forms of life like animal and plant species. This assumption of people being basically different is pervasive in most of the Indian subcontinent. In our daily interaction, it is thus important to know the jat identity of our interaction partners and accordingly limit our interaction to sectors of activity that are appropriate for our own identity. I, as well as the people of Bungamati, understand such shared assumptions. My Gurung identity as well as my gender identity limited my interaction with the people of Bungamati to certain sectors of activity no matter how hard I tried and pursued to learn about cultural features current in the Bungamati Newar community. Therefore, I did not have participatory access to many important social fora in Bungamati life; I think western anthropologists may have easy access to restricted Newar fora, even though they may have a very limited understanding of what takes place in Newar social fora. This however does not prevent me from inquiring about these sectors that I do not have direct access to. Such a situation can be characterized as an interaction structured by rules similar to those maintaining ethnic boundaries as analyzed by Barth (Barth 1969). As a Nepali, I have a conscious as well as an unconscious understanding of these boundaries and this helps me establish appropriate interaction with the people I study, and from this interactive
position I get a feel for what is appropriate for inquiry. This of course implies a constraint on how far I get in my inquiry, but it does not prevent me from discovering something of significance about the theme and the people I have decided to focus on.

In terms of interactive fieldwork, I linked up with the people of Bungamati through a longtime Newar friend from the residential area of Tharo Dhunga in Jawlakhel, (a section of the district of Lalitpur), where I first stayed when I returned to Nepal from Shillong. She spoke Newari but had no social relationship with the people of Bungamati. Coming from a low-jat background she had to pay close attention to not divulging information that would reveal her jat identity, and thereby limit our access to many fora even further.

My fieldwork consisted of conducting interviews with the people from various Newar jats and occupations, collecting simple survey data and information from public sources like the Village Development Committee (VDC) offices and District Irrigation office. I had fewer opportunities to practice the intuitive learning process that anthropologists emphasize upon, but I am sure that such intuitive learning actually took place without it being a conscious objective of my work. Furthermore, I think that I, despite my different experiences, have to some extent shared many important understandings (although I may not fully embrace them) with the people of Bungamati. We have been exposed to many common influences; for e.g. we watch the same Nepali TV station, hear the same Nepali news on the radio, generally read the same newspapers, and are subject to the same Governmental rules and regulations; we may worship at similar temples, and most importantly we share some explicit and implicit ideas about how to behave in relation to each other in different situations. However, shared understanding of how to behave in social encounters does not imply that we have a shared culture in all matters of concern to us. Even within the small community of Bungamati, people of different jats or thars (thar is often used interchangeably with jat and is a more polite way of inquiring about a person’s group identity) and different occupations harvest vastly different experiences that serve to create discontinuities in the distribution of cultural elements relating to important features like language (some jats only speak Nepali), marriage, kinship, economic occupation, ritual practices, and religious beliefs. The discontinuities in the shared understandings are less than the discontinuities in relation to my cultural understanding, but I don’t see an unbridgeable gap between us. Likewise, if I extend this
reasoning outward I cannot see the cultural threshold that implies a radical “we-they” division.

If we move outwards towards people who come from very different cultural backgrounds, or inwards towards people of Bungamati itself, I think the whole debate about a watertight divide between an “insider” and “outsider” – “we” and “they” – evaporate into thin air. Such a divide is culturally constructed, but it is the objective of fieldwork to break down these constructs as much as possible. That we, socially during fieldwork may never be able to break this divide completely, does not imply that we are unable to learn ideas across the divide - it is just such a transmission of culture across social divides that has characterized historical developments everywhere. I will not dwell further on the question of whether I am an insider or an outsider as this question relates to the context of discovery. For my thesis writing I shall be more concerned about understanding the life of the people I interacted with in Bungamati, rather than reflecting on my own innermost self.

I was interested in doing my fieldwork in Bungamati for several reasons. As I have mentioned earlier, the Newars have always struck me as being rather “different”, and my own attitude towards them were rather ambivalent. Furthermore, Bungamati is very close to my home and this made it possible for me to combine to some extent, my fieldwork with my work as administrative secretary in the Bergen-Tribhuvan Human Ecology Program. My intention was to do a broad ethnographic study of the “lived world” of the people of Bungamati. With a limited time of five months for fieldwork, it was obvious that I could only collect fragments of information on the cultural constructs in terms of which people of Bungamati understood their “world” and the way they organizationally coped with the tasks of tackling external environment of natural and politico-economic constraints. It was therefore important for me to have a focused theme for my exploration. To find an entry, which could lead me into significant dimensions of the world of the Bungamati people, I found it apt and useful to start with a theme; a theme that I had reasons to believe was one of central, practical, and ritual concern to them, namely, water. Water is a concrete material object, which is of crucial importance for peoples’ livelihood everywhere. Life is non-existent without water. On one hand, water gives life, but on the other hand it also takes it away (natural calamities like flood and
Chapter 1

People have to adapt to this material necessity of water by using it as it is, directly given by nature as rain accumulated in rivers, lakes, and pools. More relevant and important for human purposes is the development of techniques for managing access to water for consumption and agricultural production by constructing dams, canals, wells and watermills.

Given the importance of water in people’s livelihood, it is not surprising then, that people all over the world have spun webs of significance around water - they may develop special beliefs about the forces (natural and supernatural) affecting the availability of water (e.g. rain rituals) or they may develop special rituals regulating management of water (e.g. irrigation works in Bali). Furthermore, water is a concrete object with attributes which make it apt as a symbol for important ideas - water is a fluid, and it washes away physical dirt, fertilizes nature, transports physical objects from one place to another, and it is a medium in the transformation of many kinds of food from a raw state to a state suitable for human consumption. What significance people have spun around these universal properties of water does of course vary. I am living in, and studying a “life world” where the symbolic significance people have spun into water is of fundamental importance for how they understand themselves and the social and natural environment they are interacting with. Thus water provided the access I needed to get into and understand the material and symbolic world of the people in Bungamati.

1.1 The Story Of A Plough Woman

I shall try to illustrate this with a summary of an article that I read in the Nepali daily newspaper, called “Kantipur”. It is part of the story in the article that I found relevant for understanding how people in Nepal perceive material events as connected with spiritual forces.

Summary of an article from Nepali daily newspaper dated 28th August 1999:

The title of this article is “Women’s hand in plough as well as in Airplane” written by Joshila Devkota. It narrates the story of two women from very different background and from different parts of Nepal who defied the social norms set for women by the society and the consequences faced for doing so. They were the first women in Nepal who took up what was considered male job - Kavita by ploughing her fields and putting up the roof
of her house and Raksha Rana by becoming a pilot. This article relates to the events when Nepal was under *Panchayat* rule. The story of Kavita Poudel is that of a village woman who was forced to take up man’s work for which society punished her. She lived in a village called Khidim in the district of Arghakhanchi. Her husband died leaving the entire responsibility of the household on her shoulder. Agriculture and farming being the means of livelihood, it was not an easy job; she had to find someone to plough the field, had to take the oxen to the field, and get a plough for the ploughman. Some times she would wait for the ploughman who would not turn up, thus wasting valuable time in the planting period. In order to get the work done she knew that she had no choice but to plough the field herself instead of waiting for someone to do the job for her. According to Nepali norms, women do not plough the field; it is not accepted by the society and even today we hear about women being driven out of the village for doing so. The article then refers to a recent event in the village of Kailali; another woman had to leave the village because she ploughed the field. We can only imagine what treatment Kavita must have got some 28 years ago for the same event. Circumstances forced her to plough her own field but rumours of her action spread through the village like wildfire and people started to fear the inauspicious consequences of such an act. It so happened that in that very year monsoon failed to arrive on time; four months of monsoon went by with no rain. The villagers blamed her for causing drought. Her inauspicious action (ploughing the field) was blamed for lack of rain, and for the rivers and streams drying up. Village women started fasting to undo the inauspiciousness of her action; they did not allow her to have access to water in the village springs. Men in the village did not look at her for 8-9 years; her mother-in-law did not allow her to enter the house. She was brought in front of the village *panchayat* and the villagers demanded that she should be punished; some wanted her to be placed upside down while others wanted her to be sacrificed. Kavita was brave and fought for her rights; she asked the villagers to show her which holy script or law stated that women should not do men’s job; she questioned them as to which religion stated that women should not plough the fields; if there was/were such rule/rules she was willing to accept any form of punishment given to her. The villagers were not able to justify their demands or provide an answer to her questions, so she did not receive any
formal punishment from the *village panchayat*. However, she could not escape the ostracization by the society.

In my present study, the story of Kavita in the newspaper article is more relevant than the story of the female pilot. Although the story does not refer to events that took place in a Newar community I think it can serve as a form of introduction, both as an event to explore different dimensions of man-water interactions, and a case that raises important methodological issues in anthropological research.

If we take the drought as the starting event, its cause is part of natural processes. This event however, has fundamental consequences for human concerns, namely agricultural production. When such events occur, people generally seek for explanations; what explanations they seek, depend on their understanding of processes in nature. In natural science, understanding means searching for strictly material cause-effect relations. However, people in most places may search for a different kind of understanding based on ideas of mystical connections between events in nature and events in social life. In the above case, people sought the explanation of the natural event (drought) in a previous event that happened in their community: that of a woman ploughing the fields.

The question is, why this connection? Geertz in his article “Thick Description” makes the following statement: “—man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun” (Geertz 1973). Clearly in this case, people are spinning webs of significance into the drought event -- a “spinning” that connects this event to a completely different event. Why did they spin such webs of significance? Spinning webs of significance is not arbitrary but is based on material at hand, i.e., the conceptual frameworks current in the society. This is the reason why people in the Arghakanchi spun the webs they did and found it reasonable and highly plausible. Let us look at the main components in the “spinning” which was triggered by the drought events:

a) Drought, i.e. absence of rain and absence of water for crops.

b) A woman ploughing.

c) The earth being ploughed.

If we start with point c), an important ideology in the Hinduism is that the earth is female. This is even manifested in the ideology that the earth, *Bhumi*, menstruates once a year; on this day no agricultural activity should take place. Secondly the iron plough ploughing
the earth is clearly associated with sexual intercourse; the analogy between the plough penetrating the earth and the male sex organ penetrating the female’s, is commonly expressed in the Hindu ideology; that men should be steering the oxen and pulling the plough, is conceptually consistent with this analogical reasoning. A woman ploughing was thus inconsistent with this reasoning, although the country upholds no laws that state it is illegal for a woman to plough. If it were not for the event of the drought, the ploughing event in itself would have probably generated no webs of significance, except gossip and ridicule. When the drought happened however, people connected the two events, a connection which most people found self-evident. Why? What is the cultural logic behind this connection? My interpretation is as follows: Earth is conceptualized as female; when a woman ploughs the earth this is analogous to lesbian sex, i.e. sex which does not involve injection of semen and therefore cannot yield fertile offspring, or in this case, crop harvest. What is analogous to semen in this connection is rain; drought is thus absence of rain - the fertilizing semen.

When I tried to elicit comments from people in Bungamati about the relationship between the two kinds of events - woman ploughing and absence of rainfall - I did not get any explicit opinions on the matter. Does this mean that the Newars do not share such an underlying cultural “logic” (the above story referred to events in a non-Newar community), or does it mean that such a “logic” in order to become conscious requires somebody to creatively make it manifest as an explanation for particular events?

Talking about the inauspiciousness of women ploughing the field, the Newars in Bungamati did not have much to say because they do not entirely depend on cultivation by ploughing; they also utilize the hoeing cultivation method. Some may hire people from neighbouring Danwar village to plough, but generally the Bungamati Newars like most Newars in the valley use hoe (Ku in Newari) for cultivation, and the task is not identified with either the male or the female identity (I have yet to find the reason why Newars in the valley generally do not plough). Despite my many questions about possible religious prohibitions I did not get any answers that could confirm such a hypothesis. Maybe the reason is economic in the sense that most of the land is used for agriculture and very little is left for pasture. This apparently has lead the valley Newars to rear cattle for specialized milk production which is more profitable than to rear animals which
would be used once or twice in a year for ploughing purposes. This argument is supported by the fact that some Newars in Bungamati hire ploughmen from Danwar village (lying to the south about two hours’ walk from Bungamati) to plough their fields. Newars as a group are regarded as shrewd in the business field by the rest of the Nepalese, so we would, despite our recognition of the importance of ritual in Newar life, generally expect a material cause for behavior with economic consequences, e.g. the usage or none of the plough.

There have been a number of times that people have faced drought in Bungamati. Most residents in Bungamati said that rain rituals of worship and animal sacrifices performed at Kotwal Daha¹ is always successful in bringing rain. The drought was not explained as a consequence of women having done some inauspicious cultivating practices. The ideas of the earth menstruating however, is also common among the Newars and I suspect that there can also be a source of creative explanations when certain events occur; but the connection to ploughing was not made probably because ploughing is not a common practice among the Bungamati Newars.

1.2 Methodological Reflections

Reflecting on the article as I was doing my field-work in Bungamati, made me understand that very few people have very explicit ideas about the kind of cultural premises in terms of reasoning about events they are exposed to. The standard reply to the questions about many of their daily inferences was: “we don't know, we are just doing what our ancestors did”. This response is not strange to me because I automatically follow acts that have been traditionally part of my family without questioning why I act and think the way I do. As I see it, human beings are always looking for someone or something to blame when terrible things happen. Where they look to cast the blame for such events depend on the cultural assumptions that they entertain about things, which are considered abnormal, like female ploughing. I shall illustrate this with a personal event which triggered worries about its meaning for me. We have a saying in Nepali that

¹A place to the south of Bungamati where the stone-shrine of eight mother goddesses ‘Astamatrika’ is located. On several ceremonies and festivals of the village animal sacrificial rituals are performed at this place.
“if a crow drops its droppings on one’s head, it is inauspicious”; there are two ways of looking at this saying. Most of us will not have any idea about what it is that links the crow with the inauspiciousness of it releasing its droppings on someone’s head. Though I knew a bird’s droppings on someone’s head is bad, I had no idea which particular bird, and why it is bad. I only came to know about the particular bird when I experienced a bird’s droppings on my head. I felt annoyed and uncomfortable but did not give it much thought, although I knew at the back of my mind that it was an inauspicious event. The inauspicious part hit me only when I received some bad news; I started wondering about what had happened - was it telling me something? So I spoke aloud my thoughts to someone, who asked me what kind of bird was responsible for the droppings; I thought it was a pigeon. Well, I was told that only a crow’s droppings on a person bring bad news; I guess it could be that a crow is a symbol of death in our society. I am not very sure about this symbolism, but I am sure that hundreds of others who blame crows’ droppings on them for inauspicious events in their lives do not really know why its droppings causes inauspiciousness or what the crow symbolizes.

The methodological point is: If one only relies on people’s answers to one’s questions, it is unlikely that one might get at the events which contain the key that gives access to important conceptual frameworks underlying the meaning people assign to events. The interesting point is that in this case the interpretation people made of a previous event - a woman ploughing or a bird’s droppings on a person - was triggered by a later event (which might or might not have happened) - the drought or for instance an accident in my family. This connection that people make, I think, is characteristic of how we all go about understanding, grasping, and interpreting our lives. If as students of culture we are searching for the cues behind peoples’ interpretation of events, we have to be present on occasions where they apply such cues to make sense of their experience - where they, in Geertz’s words, spin webs of significance around events, or in Barth’s words, when they confer meaning to an object or an event. To grasp how people interpret events requires an interpretative act of the anthropologist – she/he has to interpret their interpretations; this is the most challenging arena for an anthropologist. Dan Sperber has addressed some of these issues; he argues that the ethnographer’s “main tool” is an ensemble of personal relationships by means of which they connect themselves to a cultural network. The
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referred “main tool” is however, not a static element that ethnographers theoretically and practically bring with them; the “main tool” is developed dynamically by establishing genuine personal relationships that are not imposing but are developed jointly, and in accordance with the feelings and ideas of each participant. No teachable technique replaces the work of intuitive understanding (Sperber 1985). In the short period of my own fieldwork I must admit that the extent to which I managed to develop such genuine relationships may fall short (in certain aspects) of Sperber’s advice. The basis for this thesis partly consists of official records, simple survey data, statements elicited from people in formal or informal interviews (some of them recorded), narratives of important events and lifestories, and by listening to gossips; it also partly consists of my intuitive interpretation of what I have heard people say and do in daily behavior, collection of stories, written material from Hindu sacred scriptures, readings of scholarly books, and from contemporary news media, and many years of exposure to Newar rituals e.g., the Machhendranath jatra on its way from Bungamati to Patan and vice versa, which passes by my home. Through this bank of data/information that I generated for my thesis, I have tried to link on to the cultural network in terms of how the people of Bungamati interpret and represent their experiences.

To proceed further, the important question of how I should use these fragments of “data” in order to convey a picture of life in Bungamati, arises. Sperber has stated the problem of representation in this way: “Then comes the moment of sharing this largely intuitive knowledge. Because it is grounded in a unique experience, the problem is each time a new one. Ideally, therefore, each ethnographer should rethink the ethnographic genre, just as a novelist rethinks the novel” (Sperber 1985). Intuitive knowledge constitutes an important source for my understanding. However, it is not my intuition I want to share with the readers of my thesis; what I want to share is my attempt at validating the understanding of life in Bungamati by building a whole out of the fragments of different kinds of observations. I assume my search for such fragments was, as I have said earlier, affected by intuitive grasps of meaning, but it was also affected by theoretical/methodological considerations. In many ways I found it useful to draw on Vayda’s (1983) perspectives on progressive contextualization in terms of taking man-water interactions as a starting point, and explore how processes in different contexts
shaped these interactions. This exploration was stimulated by Barth’s argument that we need to “understand behavior simultaneously in two, differently constituted, contexts. One is the semiotic one, where string of events is shaped by actors so as to embody meanings and transmit messages and thus reflect the rules and constraints of codification. But the same events also enter into the material world of causes and effects, both because acts have consequences and because persons must relate to others who also cause things to happen. This latter context forces actors to consider the instrumentality of acts, in ways which reflect both the constraints of knowledge and value, and the pragmatics of cooperation and competition” (Barth 1981, 3).

As I understand, this perspective is closely related to Rappaport’s argument that anthropology is a discipline with one foot in humanities and the other foot in natural sciences. In his words, “separation of the two different research traditions is misguided because the relationship between them expresses the condition of a species that lives and can only live, in terms of meanings it itself must construct in a world devoid of intrinsic meaning but subject to natural law” (Rappaport 1994). By “law” Rappaport simply means nature’s regularities and causes whether these are understood or not. Consequently we, as anthropologists, have to explore events both in terms of their cause-effect relations and in terms of their meaning to people. The forces of “nature” no matter what they really are impinge on people everywhere and consequently people everywhere must have a working knowledge of how to cope with them in order to satisfy their biological survival requirements. This practical knowledge of how to deal with the “world” surrounding them is part of their “culture”, i.e. it is part of the meaning events have for them. However people make a lot more out of the “world” of objects and processes they confront, than their causal material connections. Such entities are also elements to think with and reflect on; e.g. water may not only be understood in causal frames of reference - something our body needs, something we can manipulate for practical purposes like irrigation and hydro-electric dam - it may also be given symbolic significance, e.g. water as an agent cleaning away not only material dirt but also moral pollution; water as a symbol of the Great Mother and associated with birth, the feminine principle, the womb; water as associated with the flux of the material world, with regeneration; water as the Fountain of Life; rain water as the inseminating power of the sky god; water as an
element in blessings and rituals; crossing of water as metaphor for change from one state of being to another; water as symbol of separating people of different identity.

I shall try to link Rappaport’s perspective to Appadurai’s argument in “The Social life of things” (Appadurai 1986). Appadurai states that by looking at things in motion we can detect their cultural and social contexts -- what make things move in specific trajectories; how do people individually and collectively engage things at different ‘stations’ in their trajectories; what meanings do they spin around things as they change forms in the movement through their trajectories? We shall here look at water in its movement although this movement is primarily caused by natural processes and only partly caused by the social process of comodification, which is Appadurai’s concern. From Rappaport’s perspective the natural trajectory of water is devoid of intrinsic meaning, but man as a species is completely subject to the forces that cause this movement. The way he lives under this condition depend on the meaning he has constructed around water, i.e. the cultural baggage of knowledge and skills relating to his necessary engagement with water as well as symbolic or metaphoric meaning he has conferred on water in its different “stations” in its trajectories. The natural movement of water from the sea, evaporation and formation clouds and dew, fall of rain and its accumulation in lakes, ponds, rivers, groundwater and springs represent different natural “stations” in the hydrological trajectory of water. Man can also manipulate this natural trajectory in different ways through constructions of dams, canals, watermills etc. When such modification occurs the natural trajectory is to some extent commodified -- rights in water becomes restricted, control over water becomes a source of power, and water can be transacted for irrigation or drinking purposes etc.

I will discuss how people in Bungamati have spun meanings around natural and man-made stations and transformations in the trajectories of water; e.g. the underground water trajectory is given the meaning of some divine act in the Hindu Buddhist religious streams in Nepal; therefore the renowned tirtha (sacred places of pilgrimages at certain rivers, natural pools and fountains) are those whose waters are thought to be mingled with great holy rivers and streams, and natural pools.

Thus the anthropologist deals with the interplay of cultural constructs in terms of which, people understand and interact with the “world” and the effects (whether known or
unknown to them) of this interaction on processes in “society” and “nature”. Whether
certain western philosophical traditions, is
not very important in this context.
Whatever we refer to by the word “culture” is both subjective conceptualizations in my
mind and objectified manifestations in the form of sayings and doings that can be
interpreted. Geertz’s formulation of culture as webs of significance man himself has
spun, catches something of the interplay of subjectivity and objectivity of cultural
phenomena. Haaland has elaborated on Geertz’s perspective as follows: “Individual
human beings can only act in the world if they have been able to spin a web of
significance which provide them a workable mental “map” of their social and natural
environment and with workable instructions (‘driving rules’) for acting in that world” (G.Haaland 1998 Lecture Note). We do not spin these webs from a scratch, but
from spinning techniques and styles, which are exposed to us in symbolic form in our
social environment. However there is no guarantee that the patterns we spin in our webs
are identical to the patterns in the webs we have been exposed to, and have learned from.
An active creative effort is involved in the acquisition of spinning skills and in the
spinning practice (for construction of our mental ‘maps’ and acting according to the
‘driving rules’). Since individuals are differently positioned, e.g. with regards to gender
identity and economic and political circumstances, we must consequently expect
variations in the webs they spin. Consequently, we cannot expect that individual
members of a group are culturally identical. Whatever culture is, we can probably best
conceptualize it as a continuous production process where webs of significance are spun
by a multitude of individual spinners--spinners who actively struggle to acquire and
develop webs which allow them to cope with existential problems of meaning as well as
of material requirements. I have no doubt that some people spin more than others and are
in a hegemonic political, and economic position, with regards to influencing the patterns,
which other members of a group spin in their webs. “An important problem we are faced
with is to grasp how individual freedom in ‘spinning’ is constrained by peoples
commitment to patterns they consider acceptable.” (G. Haaland 1998 Lecture Notes). I
find this perspective useful in trying to sort out aspects of the semiotic context of man-
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water interactions in Bungamati, and through it get a grasp of Bungamati as a lived world.

This thesis is my attempt to spin “webs of significance” in an anthropological meta-language, with the goal of discovering some important processes not only in the way the people of Bungamati make sense of the world, but also of consequences following from the way they act in their social and natural environment. I have tried to make explicit methodological/theoretical considerations that I intend to take as premises for my ‘spinning’. In the process of spinning, I admit that I have found it extremely difficult not to fall into the many traps which are build into our common concept of culture as a thing which can be collected, and as something which is integrated in locally shared ways of life among the people called Newars. As I reflected on my field experiences I came to think that the Newars of Nepal share some of the characteristics Barth stated as constituting the civilization of Bali. The population of Balinese villages “aligns into conceptually discrete local units, which constitute corporate communities for various purposes” (Barth 1993; 352); this is very striking in Newar communities also. “People’s social networks are in no sense contained within the village in North Bali; but its conceptual primacy as a focal arena of social life and primacy is palpable” (Barth 1993). The same can be said of Newar communities. Like in Bali, there is a lot of variation among Newar communities both in the ranking of jats and in religious traditions embraced, in ritual festivals and in important forms of social organization. What Barth calls a surfeit of culture is certainly an important characteristic of the “lived world” in Newar communities too; people have a wide menu of cultural traditions to “spin” from in constructing a meaningful world for themselves and creating a social universe of identity and belonging. How they spin it therefore often comes out in different “patterns” in different Newar local communities. A problem when reading the rich anthropological literature on the Newars is that the anthropologists seem to have been mainly concerned with identifying what characterizes the overt forms of Newar socio-cultural “patterns” rather than on searching for processes that create variation in the patterns. Since I, to a large extent, am drawing on this anthropological literature I see that my representation also tends to fall into the same trap.
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Initially I thought of structuring my thesis as a kind of progressive contextualization where I stepwise presented wider and denser contexts of man-water interactions along the lines Vayda recommend as a discovery procedure. However, I found this to be extremely difficult because at every step I was faced with the necessity to elaborate on so many dimensions of collective and statistical social features, and sets of cultural concepts. The solution I have adopted is to start with a simple descriptive outline of Kathmandu Valley and Bungamati in a way which gives the reader a “feeling” of what the place is like. I will present generalized features of the geography and history of Kathmandu Valley, and formal organizational frameworks in Newar communities and religious traditions, which I consider relevant for my study of Bungamati. My line of thinking follows Barth’s (Barth 1993; 240) consideration: “Since it is a premise of the analysis that people inhabit a culturally constructed reality, we must know a vast range of externalities of life, and the cultural conceptions and conventions by which those externalities are known and interpreted, to enable us to join people in the reality within which they act.”

From this description mainly based on reports from various anthropologists who have worked among the Newars I proceed to my case material from Bungamati where I start with an impressionistic sketch leading the reader by the road from Jawlakhel via my home into the streets and localities of Bungamati village. Then I will try to bring out features, which characterize the particular form of Newar life in this community. Finally I will take up different contexts of man-water interactions.
Chapter 2

2 KATHMANDU VALLEY AND NEWARS

Bungamati is a small Newar village with a typical urban flavour. What goes on in the village, is influenced by the larger social environment of Newars, as well as non-Newars. Before I go into observations from Bungamati I find it necessary to place it in the context of more generalized presentations other anthropologists have given of Newar society and culture.

The Newars as Gellner (1995) puts it, are “traditional” inhabitants of Kathmandu Valley, and Newar villages exhibiting strong Newar culture is spread all over the valley. Bungamati is one of many such villages scattered around the valley.

Figure I: Map of Kathmandu. Adapted from Toffin: Societe et Religion chez les Newar du Nepal.
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Kathmandu valley is endowed with very rich soil, derived from the bed of an ancient lake. This fertile soil supports a dense population gathered into a number of settlements. The most populous are the former capitals of the three Kingdoms: Kathmandu, now the national capital, Patan (known as Lalitpur today), and Bhaktapur. The valley has been the seat of literate high culture from the ancient times and continues to do so today. The dominant group of people inhabiting the valley is the Newars and history tells us that the valley got its name “Nepal” from these early inhabitants of the Valley; though Nepal is the name of the entire country, it meant only the Kathmandu valley to most people from different corners of the country until very recently. The language spoken by them is Newari belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family. Most Newars also speak Nepali (a language of the Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family) and need Nepali language for official work. Today there is a movement to promote Newari language (Nepal Bhasa) as official language at least in the Valley.

The two capitals of the old Newari kingdoms - Kathmandu and Patan lie at the confluence of its two largest rivers: the Bagmati and Vishnumati; today they constitute one sprawling urban complex. Many of the nearby villages around Kathmandu have been absorbed into Kathmandu city quarters or suburbs and the old Malla Kathmandu exists only as a core subset within the greater Kathmandu complex. There are few Newar settlements in the Kathmandu shopping area like Asan Tole where we find the traders like Tuladhars, Shresthas, and Sakyas, the goldsmiths. The old Newari multi-story houses can still be seen in the midst of modern multi-story building mushrooming between the old buildings. About fifteen to twenty years ago, Kathmandu city was still a Newar city with a dominant number of shopkeepers, goldsmiths, traders and restaurant owners belonging to the Newar jat. Newari was the most commonly spoken language in the city streets and the city still retained its traditional Newari characteristic. The year 2000 AD however, shows a completely different picture. The Newars are confined to their small areas like Asan Tole, and few craft shops in the Hanuman Dhoka and New Road area. Traders and businessmen from the Indian subcontinent and immigrants from various corners of the country have taken up much of the Newari domain of business and traditional city of Kathmandu. Today, we hear more Nepali and Hindi in Kathmandu city than in other cities like Patan and Bhaktapur.
Figure II: Map of Kathmandu and surrounding areas. Adapted from Toffin: Société et Religion chez les Newar du Nepal.
Except for the few temple squares and some Newari settlements like Asan tole, Kathmandu has almost lost its old Newari city uniqueness. Kathmandu is very densely populated with recent data from the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) showing an approximate 675,341 as the population count. I guess the changes in the city must have started from the time of Gorkha invasion when the Shah dynasty chose Kathmandu to be their Royal City and left the other two cities pretty much to themselves.

Patan on the other hand is still a distinct city coterminous to the old capital. It is the main city of Lalitpur district today. The population of the district as a whole is about 257,086 (recent census of the CBS), and agriculture has been the main basis for its economy. In this district, *Buddha Margi* (followers of the so-called Buddhist path) is more dominant than *Siva Margi* (followers of the so-called Hindu path), and the city is thus regarded as more Buddhist. We find that the majority of the farmer *jat*, Jyapu, in the city of Patan and villages of Lalitpur. Newari art and culture still characterize the Patan city; important temples like Krishna *mandir*, and *Bahahs/Bahals* (monasteries) like Kwa Bahah, and typical multi storey Newari houses surrounding the temple squares form the traditional city attracting many tourists. Modernization has been unavoidable but the main city of Patan still maintains its traditional look and many villages in Lalitpur are traditional Newar villages.

Bhaktapur is another of the three old kingdoms; it is an ancient city that has a dense population of about 172,952 as per the CBS. As history shows, this city, though only about eight miles from Kathmandu was culturally untouched even after the Gorkha king conquered the city. Changes of modern world crept on it when Nepal opened itself to the West in 1950; however, it still retains the traditional Newar characteristic, which seems to be lost in Kathmandu city. The Temple of Taleju and the Royal Palace form the centre of the city; the city is divided into two halves: an upper half and lower half (R.I.,Levi: 1990,169). Barre et al. (1981,46) writes that the division into upper and lower city is a characteristic common to Newar settlements whether urban or rural. Its economy being fundamentally based on agriculture like the whole country, it is ringed with farmlands. Bhaktapur's farmers, like the typical Newar farmers, live in the city and go to work in the farmland whenever necessary. Besides agriculture, a small percentage of Newars in Bhaktapur are engaged in commerce (shops and trades), manufacturing, and primarily
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crafts; a small number of people are engaged in construction (mostly building houses). With the introduction of education and development, a number of people are found working in the offices like banks and other government enterprises. Bhaktapur is often considered to be the most proto-typical Newar community containing many jat groups of this complex civilization – from the high-jat priests, traders, farmers, craftsmen, bakers, butchers, musicians, barbers, washer men to the lowest sweepers. The settlement structure of the city is such that we find the ritually high ranking jats concentrated in the city center: like the Brahmans (Rajopadhayas), Shresthas (the sahus or shopkeepers) surrounded by the Jyapus (farmers); the lower jats occupying the outer rim of the city forming a mandala model of settlement as is characteristic of Newar settlement. Bhaktapur like the other towns and cities of the valley draw a large number of tourists who come to admire its royal palaces, temples and traditional Newar life and culture.

The ethnic pride of the Newars is manifested in their veneration of the Newar language (Nepal Bhye in Newari; Nepal Bhasa in Nepali), art and craft products (wooden sculptures, bronze images, stone sculptures, thanka paintings, masks), and Newar rituals, jatras and feasts. Newari arts and crafts can be seen in temples, stupas, shrines, bahahs/viharas, dwelling houses, public buildings, and in the many shops for tourists.

2.1 The Gorkha Conquest Of The Newar Kingdoms

Documented history of Kathmandu Valley is very limited before 464 AD The legendary history tells of the valley as a lake and according to the Buddhists, Boddhisattva Manjushri with his sword, cut a gorge through the southern hills surrounding the lake thus draining the waters from the Valley, while the Hindus believe that it was Vishnu who drained the waters of the valley. Although little is known about the documented history of the valley before 464 A.D, Slusser (1982) writes that “one can only assume that Valley prehistory is one of gradual infiltration of people from the surrounding hills, some groups of which may have drifted south from the harsh Tibetan plateau”. These immigrants were probably ancestral to contemporary Nepalese hill tribes - the Magar, Gurung, Kiranti (Limbu, Rai), and others living outside the Valley, and to the Tamangs, who occupy the valley slopes. The period of 300-879 AD documents the presence of Licchavi (the sanskrit/prakrit-speaking group), which apparently formed a state including
parts of modern Nepal as well as parts of northern India. There are also some scriptural
references to groups like Sakya, Koliya Vrj, well known to northern India from the time
of the Buddha (G.Vajracharya1965). The Muslim conquest of India at the end of the
twelfth century brought large number of refugees to the Valley, like the orthodox
Brahmins from Mithila (directly south of the valley) as well as Buddhists from the
devastated monasteries of Bihar. The others settled in the hill regions of the western
Nepal. The large-scale immigration to these hill regions was mostly of the high-jat
Brahmins and Kshatriya military aristocracy (Chhetris in Nepali), and of the low jat
occupational groups such as tailors, shoemakers and blacksmiths. This influx fortified the
Indian immigrants who had long filtered into the country and mixed in various measures
with the established local population essentially issuing from two streams: the Khas,
Indo-Aryans who spoke a Sanskritic language (khas kura) ancestral to Nepali and the
Tibeto-Burmese speaking tribes particularly the Magar and Gurung. By the sixteenth
century, an ethnically mixed military aristocracy who often claims Rajput descent (the
chivalrous Hindu military aristocrats of Rajasthan) had carved out numerous petty hill
states in the area west of Kathmandu Valley. Gorkha, a tiny principality to the immediate
west of the valley was one of them. Dravya Shah in 1559 A.D founded it.
In the eighteenth century, the Shah principality in Gorkha was growing stronger under the
leadership of Prithivi Narayan Shah; the Newars had for several centuries been politically
organized into several culturally Indianized city-states like Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur
governed by rulers with the dynastic name of Malla. Tibetan trade was an important
feature of the valley economy besides agriculture, and flourished greatly under the Malla
dynasty (1200-1769 AD); great wealth flowed to the valley from this trade. The Malla
dynasty is thought to be probably outsiders, ascending to power in the Kathmandu Valley
after the demise of the earlier Thakuri dynasty. The Malla period was an intense period of
literary activity, art, and architecture. All of the Malla kings and nobilities built temples,
viharas, water tanks, fountains and rest houses together with lavish endowments for their
maintenance. The Malla period particularly from the time of Sthitimalla mark the
increasing Hinduization of the Kathmandu Valley and although many historians offer
differing interpretations concerning the rise of jat system in Nepal, all agree that the
development of the jat system was due to the influence of the secular ruler and followed
from a deliberate political and social policy devised and implemented by the Malla kings (Greenwold, 1975).

Despite the impressive civilization they developed in their *jat*-based society, the weakness of this dynasty lay in their inability to form a joint and united force. Each little city kingdom was fighting with one another constantly; quarrels, feuds and jealousies were the order of the day. The fundamental inability of the Malla kings to get along with each other brought their rule to an end.

The Gorkha principality under Prithvi Narayan Shah was growing and the disunity among the Malla rulers made it easier for Prithvi Narayan’s campaign of conquest. The other important factor in the Gorkha conquest of the Valley was its strategic location with respect to both the Kathmandu Valley and the lucrative trade route between the valley and Tibet.

After a long struggle, the Gorkhalis took Kathmandu under their possession in 1769 AD. The term Gorkhali designates the Nepalese who speak Nepali as their mother tongue, and come from, or are historically connected with Gorkha. Gorkhalis are also called *Parbatiya* “hill people” referring to all hill-dwelling ethnic groups, but commonly referring to the Nepali language speakers like Brahman and Chhetri.
The possession of Kathmandu afforded the Gorkhas both the financial resources to carry out further campaigns and the administrative facilities needed to retain their conquests. Finally Prithvi Narayan Shah was able to gain political and military unification of the entire area, which more or less correspond to the area that defines Nepal today. The strongly centralized authority that successive Shah monarchs had won did not last very long. Kathmandu was made the capital in 1770 AD and Prithvi Narayan Shah died in 1775 AD after which the political position of the ruling family was thoroughly undermined, and a number of Chhetri (Kshatriya varna) families were contending for power. “The political system in this period, thus, was characterized by a highly segmented, pyramidal structure dominated by a handful of Chhetri families, assisted and advised by a number of prominent Brahman families” (Leo E. Rose and Margaret W. Fisher, 1970). Power and influence shifted among and within these families from time to time. The Shah dynasty however did not completely lose its political prerogatives; the throne was held by the Shah dynasty and provided the main continuity and stability experienced in Nepal during this period of complicated maneuvers and counter maneuvers by rival Chhetri families.
King Rajendra (Shah dynasty) made desperate efforts to revive the authority of the royal family but his efforts ultimately brought disaster to the dynasty. It was at this time that the brilliant political leader, Jang Bahadur Kunwar, known as Jang Bahadur Rana in history, was able to smash all rival political factions in an efficiently conducted massacre in the royal palace courtyard (1846 AD). He stripped the king of all political power and the absolute power lay in the hands of his own family. The position of his family within the political structure was institutionalized in the Sanad (royal decree) of 1856 AD, extracted from the reluctant but helpless reigning monarch, King Surendra Shah. This document granted Jang Bahadur and his successors absolute authority in civil and military administration, justice, and foreign relations, including the right to ignore the commands of the king if these should be considered inappropriate or contrary to national interests. Thus the royal family lost all its power though they were entitled with the name “Maharajdhiraj” (King of Kings).

Jung Bahadur Rana attempted to legislate national integration through the Muluki Ain (Legal Code) of 1854 AD. It was a civil and religious code, which ordered relations between Nepali subjects; its main purposes were to emphasize Nepal’s political identity, strengthen Hinduism, establish a national legal system, and unify the country by integrating previously independent social groups (Hofer 1979 A.D.). Despite the profound internal divisions within communities, each ethnic group was assigned a jat and was placed within the Hindu ritual varna hierarchy as a single, indivisible entity. At the top of the hierarchy were the high jat Parbatiya; in the middle were the Matwali (a varna peculiar to Nepal, but more or less corresponding to the position of the Vaishya varna in India) consisting of jats of Tibeto-Burman speaking, alcohol drinking and buffalo-meat eating people, and at the bottom were the Indo-Aryan service jats and untouchables. As Tibeto-Burmese speaking people the Newar community was placed in the middle in this hierarchy; they were officially recognized as having an elaborate degree of internal stratification.

The Rana regime was overthrown in 1950 A.D, the new independent Indian state was not sympathetic to the Ranas. Anti-Rana forces in India led by recently formed Nepali congress launched a series of attacks across the border in the Nepal Terai. The same day, king tribhuvan sought and received asylum in the Indian embassy and was later flown to
New Delhi; the Indian government decided to support the king and Nepali congress. The Rana monopoly of political power was terminated but Rana families were allowed to retain certain offices at the king’s discretion. A coalition called Rana-Nepali congress cabinet was formed. Since King Tribhuvan was a passive ruler, the struggle for formation of a stable government went on until his death in 1955 AD. Unlike his father, King Mahendra directly and actively participated in the political process. After an experiment with parliamentary rule, he introduced a new political system termed “Panchayat Raj” in 1960 AD the panchayat system, as outlined in the 1962 constitution and amended in 1967 was organized on a three-tier structure. Panchayats on the lower village (grahmin) and town (nagar) were elected directly from people of these communities having a right to vote. To the higher level district and national Panchayats, the representatives were elected indirectly from the lower level Panchayats i.e. the lower Panchayats elected from among their member representatives to the next district (zilla) level Panchayats. Then they again elected representatives at the highest level-- the national (rashtriya) Panchayat - the “parliament” under the Panchayat Raj.

The 1963 AD new code of law (Muluki Ain) legally abolished the jat system, but in reality this did not substantially change the jat system. Whatever alteration occurred due to these changes however consolidated the old order. Those educated and literate in Nepali monopolized opportunities in the administrative sector. Bahuns (a common name for Brahmins in Nepal) with their Sanskrit education, and to lesser extent the Chhetris and the Newars, established a stronghold over the administration.

“Before, during and after the Panchayat era Nepali society, politics have been controlled by a tripartite Bahun- Chhetri - Newar establishment” (Brown 1996). Those of high jat status led the outlawed political parties and even the communist parties.

Panchayat democracy remained officially partyless, but the system paradoxically allowed political parties to function on a quasi-legal basis (Brown1996). Liberalization led to the emergence of a de facto multi-party system. By the closing of the years of the decade, multi-party supporters were well represented within the Panchayat System although this did not change the traditional authoritarian form of Panchayat system characterized by inflexibility and a deepening crisis of legitimacy.
On the brink of a new decade, urban social upheavals, the increased politicization of the educated and the country’s economic stagnation, had created the conditions for political change. The crisis with India in the late 1980’s then sharpened frustrations, polarizing the political spectrum and acting as a catalyst for a Jana Andolan (People’s Movement). The 1990 Constitution made it clear that the King was to be a constitutional monarch who acted on the advice and only with the consent of his ministers. Representatives to the Parliament were elected directly and the power of the cabinet was based on support from the parliament. The last decade has seen a succession of weak governments led by the Communist party or by the Congress with support from shifting alliances with minor parties.

2.2 Settlement Model—Mandala structure

The fertile lowlands of the valley have been the settlements of most Newari people, while villages on the upland plateau and the steep slopes of the valley have for most part been Parbatiya (hill people) settlements, usually Chhetri (Nepali speaking members of different jats of Kshatriya varna) and Tamang (speakers of a language belonging to the Tibeto- Burmese language family and generally claiming to be Buddha Margi).

Parbatiya settlements are located on hilly agriculturally less productive soil. These villages are spread among terraced fields with individual houses linked by pathways. In these settlements we do not find large town centers with complex shopping areas, impressive temples and community buildings. Unlike the Newari houses, these village houses are mostly two storied, thatch-roofed and have wide verandahs.

Newar settlements in the valley have distinctive urban character whether they are cities, towns or even villages. These settlements are tight clusters of densely packed multi-story houses; we find that even villages have streets, squares, shopping areas, temples and community buildings. Most Newar towns and villages are generally found along the rivers and streams that flow through the more level Valley floor.

Another important feature of Newar settlement in the Valley is that space is ritually organized according to the mandala model—Cities, towns, villages, temples, shrines are found organized according to it. Gellner (1992:190) defines “mandala” as an arrangement of deities conceived in sets of four, eight, or sixty-four, laid out along the
axes of the cardinal points around a center. This symbol is basically used by priests for complex rituals to arrange patterns of coloured powder and representations of divinities. To ordinary Newars, *mandala* means just that: a kind of ritual symbol used for some complex rituals. However, studies made by N. Gutschow and M. Bajracharya make it clear that the *mandala* model in addition to city, temple and shrine also applies equally to the whole Universe, the whole country (Nepal). The works of Gutschow and Kolver (1975) and Barre et al. (1981) have firmly established that the *mandala* design was the basis of town planning in early Malla Nepal. Shepherd (1985: 121) has analyzed the *mandala* symbol into three basic and interconnected elements: boundedness, hierarchy and the importance of the center. Zanen (1986:150) exploring the *mandala* model in relation to the layout of the town of Sankhu in the northeast of the Valley analyzes it into six underlying elements:

i. The palace at the center.

ii. The division of the town into two halves.

iii. An eightfold division of the town, each unit with a Mother Goddess.

iv. A fourfold division of the town each attached to one of four gates.

v. An outer circle of Eight Mother Goddess and eight cremation grounds, surrounding the town.

vi. A festival route (paradaksina patha) within the town.

All the cities, towns, or villages may not share the above elements. The palace in Kathmandu is slightly off-center and even more so in Bhaktapur; however they represent the center in the sense that the power and importance lies in these palaces and the Malla kings in the days of their reign found ways of demonstrating ritually that the palace, wherever it was, was the center. In Lalitpur, the palace is at the center of the city; in a village like Bungamati, the temple of Machhendranath forms the center, and the concentration of the ritually higher ranked groups like Sakyas and Vajracharyas are found close to the center. As mentioned by Gellner and other anthropologists, and as per my observation, *jat* in Bungamati form spacial residence—the higher the jat, the closer the residence is to the center. This *mandala* model also applies to the Newar houses. The lowest floor of the house is regarded as the outer rim of the house, which normally takes the pollution. The polluted *jats* are allowed access to the lowest floor of the house; a dead
body is also placed on the lowest floor before taking it for cremation. The higher floor is restricted and a pure sanctum of the house, and is protected from pollution. Only those belonging to a higher jat or of one’s own jat are generally allowed to the floors housing the kitchen and worship room.

2.3 Elements Of Main Religious Traditions

2.3.1 Buddha Margi and Siva Margi

In terms of religious affiliation, the Newars say that some of them are Siva Margi (followers of Siva), while others are Buddha Margi (followers of Buddha). In this context Siva stands for all ways of worship associated with Hindu religious traditions, whether the worship is directed towards images of Siva, Vishnu, Durga or any gods or goddesses. In scholarly works, Siva Margi and Buddha Margi are often called Hindus and Buddhists respectively, and often represented as members of two contrasting religious communities. I suspect that this representation can be misleading because it carries with it connotations from western confessional religious traditions where religious identity is exclusively associated with specific “churches”. In Nepal and the Indian subcontinent, the situation is different; Margi refers to the path one is following in one’s worship and the important difference between the two paths relates to differences between two types of religious specialists and the ritual practices through which they lead the followers to worship. Those using Gubaju/Guruju (Vajracharya priests) are Buddha margi, while those using Deo Brahman or Parbatiya Brahman are Siva Margi. In Kathmandu valley there are a number of places for worship; temples and shrines associated with Siva Margi and stupas, shrines, Bahahs or Viharas (monasteries) associated with Buddha Margi. Although many Newars will associate themselves with one of these two religious paths, the difference between them in their everyday life is insignificant. The deity Ganesh is as important to Buddhist worship as it is to Hindu. Both Hindu and Buddhist Newars equally revere the Buddhist lord Machhendranath (god of rain and harvest) and the Hindu triads-Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar (creator, contender and destroyer). There are differences but they do not form a significant issue. So far affiliation with Hinduism or Buddhism has not led to the emergence of an identity more compelling than Newar and jat identity. Modern political pressures may change the situation; however, Newars seem to be more
concerned about demonstrating their cultural distinction to the non-Newars than to seek a community in association with people following specific religious paths.

### 2.3.2 The Material And The Spiritual

In studying religious traditions of South Asia, it is important to keep in mind the idea of the intimate connection between the material and the spiritual in their understanding of their “selves” and their “world”. The moral constitution of an individual is conceptualized as embedded in physical matter brought into the body through interactions in a social and natural environment from sexual intercourse, food intake and physical contacts. Likewise, the natural environment of the sun, the moon, the stars, the rivers, the hills, the mountains, and etc. are understood in a culturally constructed framework of cosmological forces. The man-made environment is not only seen in the framework of a “map” of social features like occupation and *jat*, but it is also seen as imbued with meanings of consequence for how one moves in this environment. All over the place one can see how man makes more or less lasting material structures expressing such a way of perceiving the “world”. As one walks around in the valley, one is thus not only moving in a material landscape but also moving in a spiritual landscape. An individual has to manage material interactions with one’s environment in order to manage one’s spiritual “status”. The way one moves in physical space is also influenced by considerations of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness of elements in that space. As one moves through natural and social space, one also moves in a ritualized landscape of items one pays respect to, or avoids. The micro-level individual is thus placed in the context of a macro-level spiritual cosmos manifested in natural and man-made forms.

Such ideas are expressed in an enormously rich and complex imagery of myths, sculptures, paintings etc., which I find very hard to explain in a logically coherent way probably because this imagery was not created for logical purposes but for reflections on the mysteries of human existence.

Thus in our religious traditions, we have names for an incredible number of images of so-called “gods” and “goddesses”. Many of the different “gods” are just different names used to express different (even contrasting) aspects of the same complex ideas; for e.g., Siva, Bhairav, Maheswar, and Rudra are generally thought of as being expressions of the
same “god”, so is the case with the names of Parvati, Durga and Kali, as different names for aspects of the “goddess”.
Such traditions do not exist by themselves but depend on social arrangements of transmission -- arrangements that involve different kinds of people who engage in reproduction of the imagery, from artists to religious specialists, and from associations performing rituals at temples and homes, to those staging large festivals. I will try to outline the main actors involved in this reproduction of the imagery in Bungamati.

2.4 Newar Caste System

*Caste system in our society is like Sun and Moon, it was there when men came into being and it will be there as long as there is sun and moon.*
-- Sakya priest of Machhendranath temple

*Caste system is just the outcome of policies of the rulers (king). It was Jayasthiti Malla who organized our Newar society into caste according to our occupation.*
-- A village Newar layman.

The above statements show that some Newars regard *jat* as divinely ordained hierarchy stemming from time immemorial while others see *jat* as a social creation introduced through a legal code established by a king. Whatever the origin of *jat* system in Nepal, it was certainly enforced by political and legal structures of the society in the Malla and Gorkha reign. Unclean, impure, and polluted are legal terms defined by the state legal codes and enforced through sanctions devised and implemented by secular authorities (Greenwold 1975). The unclean group was forbidden to interact with members of clean *jats* in matters of food exchanges or of sexual favours. Only individuals of clean *jats* could freely exchange water, and men were permitted sexual intercourse with women of a lower *jat* as long as the women were not of a *jat* from which water could not be accepted. *Jat* mobility was also a matter of governmental concern. Change of *jat* rank to higher status through deceit or trickery was prohibited. The decision of the state was final in the *jat* mobility. There are accounts of such decisions like the one in which Jung Bahadur of the Rana regime elevated Manandhar/Saimi (oil-pressers) from unclean position to that of clean, water acceptable position.
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Under the Gorkha regime the whole society was divided as in Newar dynastic times, into two large opposing categories according to the criterion of acceptance or rejection of water. Newars under this division were classified as *Matwali* or an alcohol-consuming community and were placed below the Gorkhali-speaking *jats* classified as *Tagadhari* (wearing sacred thread). The state also accepted the internal Newar *jat* system, which was more or less similar to pan-Nepali system except for the placement of Newar as non-*Tagadhari* even though some Newar *jats* such as Newar Brahmans and some sections of the Shrestha did undergo the investiture ceremony.

The Newar caste system is a complex one, and many anthropologists have made contributions to the study of caste in the Newar community. When discussing caste among Newars, Colin Rosser adheres to the view of caste as a system of stratification in which differences in rank are derived ultimately and basically from the distribution of political and economic power within the system. According to him, even the position of a Brahman depends primarily upon the power and patronage of the ruler or directly upon the Brahman’s own political and economic power (Rosser, 1966). Louis Dumont in contradiction to Rosser, adheres to the view that the basis of caste is the polar opposition of purity and impurity; in an article published in 1964 Dumont concluded that the Newars neither constitute a caste, nor have caste among them. For Dumont the internal Newar subdivisions are not really castes or sub-castes but a “conglomerate of groups” distinguished by their profession, social status and religion: “we are confronted with an enormous conglomerate of groups distinguished by their profession, social status (and among the Newar, even religion). Clearly these conglomerates are not castes, although they may appear as such in certain situations in relation to real outsider castes (Brahmans, Kshatriyas). Whether each of them is an old population which has adapted itself to Hindu influence by inner stratification and close combination with Hindu castes, or whether a name endowed with prestige (Nayar: “ruler”) has been borrowed by lower levels of society and has become a blanket term for most of the native population, it is clear that we have to do with populations, not with castes” (Dumont, 1964). This conclusion has, however been widely discredited. Prominent anthropologists like Toffin (1984) and Quigley (1987) have tried to show otherwise. As a Nepali living in the valley and having everyday interaction with Newars from different walks of life, Quigley’s statement
The single most crucial fact in this respect is the existence of their own autonomous caste system”, seems to be closer to Newar reality, although I have certain reservations about his statement about the autonomy of the Newar caste system.

Whatever the origin of the Newar caste system and the major areas of disputes among social scientists over the definition of the role of ritual symbols within a caste system, one very clear aspect of this is manifested in the way people use natural substances to express the distinction between pure and impure.

2.4.1 Caste Boundaries

The Newars like the non-Newar Hindus delineate boundaries between ranked groups termed *jats* and *thars* primarily on the basis of four behavioral criteria: physical proximity, commensality, marriage and the kind of occupational activities associated with *jats*. Activities like washing clothes, killing animals, or forging iron, are considered polluting, and avoided by members of *jats* not having these activities as their *jat* occupation. These criteria for *jat* membership and exclusion are applied with varying degrees of rigidity among the Newars, depending particularly upon the village, locality and *jats* or *thars* concerned.

a. Physical Proximity

Those at the bottom of the hierarchy may not touch those above them; their touch require subsequent purification (*thiye majyupim*). The principles of inter-*jat* proximity apply to both physical contact as well as privileges of residential location and access to various parts of the Newar home. In most Newari villages or cities, the untouchables (*thiye majyupim*) occupy the locality’s outskirts. Admittance into the various parts of Newari houses depends on the extent of the difference between the *jat* rank of the host and the visitors. Newari houses are several storeys tall, and admittance to the higher floors is more restricted than to those below. The kitchen is the most sacred place and is located on the topmost floor.

b. Commensality

Commensality defines one of the boundaries of intimacy: those with whom one may share boiled rice (*ja chale jyu pim*), those who share only feast food (*phoye chale jyu*
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Pim), and those from whom one may not take water (lah chale majyupim). The first group (sharing of boiled rice) includes only members of the same jat. Feasts, provided they only include food that do not convey pollution\(^2\) may be shared with anyone from whom one may take water (lah chale jyu pim). Most jats that traditionally engage in polluting occupations are those from whom water is not accepted (lah chale jyupim). In the village, feasts that relate to a marriage ceremony may include people from both sides of the water line, though the majyupim\(^3\) are usually seated at a discreet distance from the others. Raw food may be shared by anyone.

C. Marriage And Commensality

Jat endogamous marriage is preferred. This is the only form of marriage that does not have negative consequences for the offspring if the father has accepted rice cooked by his wife. Hypergamous marriage is tolerated if they do not cross the “water acceptable line”; however if the man is not commensal with the wife, the children may retain the name of the father but cannot be a member of their father’s si guthi (death association). Children of the jat hypergamous commensal couple may assume a jat between that of their father and mother, and their grandchildren may re-assume the status of their grandfather if subsequent marriages have been appropriate. Hypergamous marriages that cross water acceptability barrier entail loss of jat for the groom as well as consequent loss of membership in si guthi and commensal rights with his agnatic kin. The wife faces the same consequences, whether or not the groom is of water acceptable line. The woman loses her jat in a hypergamous alliance even though the husband may be of water acceptable line.

These criteria may however be manipulated; a man may have a hypergamous marriage with someone of water acceptable line and the family members accept the marriage. He may even eat rice cooked by his wife in his home but not let the rest of the members of his jat know about it and thus retain his jat. Sometimes children of hypergamous marriage (of water acceptable line) are entered as members into the si guthi of their

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\(^2\) Any food cooked in water is regarded as polluting, especially rice ‘ja’ and lentils ‘kem’, the staple Newar diet; however, boiled rice is eaten by higher caste in certain situations by adding ghee which purifies it; rice cooked in milk is also not polluting

\(^3\) The terms lah chale majyupim and lah chale jyupim are often shortened into majyupim or “those with whom (it is) not permitted”, and jyupim or “those with whom (it is) permitted”.

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father, which under normal circumstances would not be possible. The ways in which hospitality is offered and accepted (or refused), for example, may challenge rank, convey acceptance as an equal, or pay respect to a superior.

d. Association of caste identity with specific occupation

The characteristic association of *jat* identity with occupational specialization is pervasive in Newar communities. Table 1 shows the conventional ranking of the *jats* and their associated occupations. It represents an approximate hierarchical order and the data is drawn primarily from Nepali (1965) and Gellner (1995); the higher the rank, the purer the group.
Table 1: THE NEWAR CASTE SYSTEM ACCORDING TO HIERARCHICAL POSITIONS

Water Acceptable Jats (lah chale jyupim): Their purohita (family priest) is a Brahman or Vajracharya and their body purification rite is performed by the Nau (barber) jat.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels</th>
<th>Jat</th>
<th>Thars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>Deo Brahman</td>
<td>Rajopadhya: Purohit for all Hindu Newars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bare</td>
<td>Vajracharya: Gubaju or Purohita for all Buddhist Newars. Saky: Commonly referred to as ‘Bare’ in contrast to Vajracharya. Temple priests with right of membership in Newar Buddhist vihara and also traditionally gold and silversmiths.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>Chhathare</td>
<td>Jos: Astrologer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(Siva Margi)</td>
<td>Malla- descendants of royal family.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pradhan, Amaty and other subcastes are descendants of royal advisors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Panchthare (Siva Margi)</td>
<td>Karmacharya (acaju)-tantric priests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Shresthas - Mixed offspring of chhathare and Panchthare</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thimi Shresthas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dhlulikhel Shresthas</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uray/Udas (Buddha Margi)</td>
<td>Tuladhar - Merchant</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Baniya - Merchant</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sikarmi - Wood worker, house builder</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tamrakar (Tava)-metal smith</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Loh(n)-karmi-Stone worker</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Awa – Mason</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kansakar - worker in bronze</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tamot - stone worker(not recognized as Uray because they eat chicken)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Jyapu</td>
<td>Maharjan/Dangol-farmers (majority in Lalitpur area-Patan, Bungamati etc.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Suwal - Bhaktapur Hindu jyapu, numerous other subcastes</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kumhal- potter, not accepted as jyapu by all.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pahari- farmers from the outskirts of the valley, not accepted other Jyapus.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Jats whose body purification rite is performed by Nay/khadgi jat

Level IV --

Gathu/Mali – gardeners (provider of flowers for worship)
Nau – They provide barber service, cutting and painting nails in purification rituals to all levels above this level.
Chitrakar/Pun - painter, painting picture of various deities as well as houses and temples.
Cheepa/Ranjitkar - dyer of cloth
Manandhar/Salmi - oil pressers
Kow – Newar blacksmith

Water Unacceptable Jats (lah chale majyupin)

Level V Touchable Jats

Sanga/or Sangat - Dhobi
Bha –Dyers of red cloth
Nay/Kasai/khadgi - butchers
Kusle (jogi) - musicians

Untouchable Jats

Kulu – cobbler, drum makers
Pore – fishers, skinners, traditionally executioners
Chyame - night-soil remover
Hara Huru - offspring of Pore/Chyame
In Bungamati we do not find all the various Newar jats as given in the figure above; it is mostly a concentration of farmer jat and ritually high ranked Buddha Margi jats. I will not go into a detailed discussion on the hierarchy system, different theories, and debates on who is ranked higher- Hindu or Buddhist priests, Hindu or Buddhist merchants. There are as many different Newar opinions as there are Newars, regarding jat hierarchy, e.g., the Panchthare Shresthas will vigorously distinguish themselves from Shresthas who are not among their descent groups. The names “Thimi Shrestha” or “Dhulikhel Shrestha” are examples of names applied by other Shresthas to distinguish these groups of questionable (and therefore lower) ranked “Shresthas” from themselves, while the Chhathare like Malla, Pradhan (descendants of royal functionaries) would consider all “Shresthas” as belonging to one group as they both have dubious heritage from the Chhathare perspective. Kathmandu Urays (Tuladhars) consider the Uray rank claimed by the Bungamati Tuladhars questionable. Bhaktapur Jyapus consider themselves to be superior from their counterparts in Lalitpur and Kathmandu who eat food prepared by Bare. The Bare jat enjoys a high rank among Jyapus in Lalitpur and Kathmandu but lower among the predominantly Hindu Newars of Bhaktapur. The Kumha Jyapus intermarry freely with Jyapus of Kathmandu but not with Jyapus from Panauti and Bhaktapur as the latter consider the former inferior. In Lalitpur, the Kumha Jyapus are considered slightly inferior than the Lalitpur Jyapus; the inferiority may not play a significant role in intermarriage. Jyapus using Gubaju (Vajracharya priests) as household priests are found to change to Rajopadhya priests to climb up the rank ladder when their economic position rises. So the struggle for superiority goes on internally even within the community. The purpose behind my outlining this hierarchy is to show the various approximate rankings in the Newar society, and how water forms an idiom for separating clean and unclean jats and how the whole Newari community is interdependent on the services of these various groups.

4 In Bungamati, offspring of Bare or Shrestha man and a Jyapuni is dubbed “Tuladhar”
3 BUNGAMATI

3.1 Mythic History – The tale of Machhendranath

There is an interesting tale of how the village got its name; it is clearly linked with the tale of Machhendranath.

In the bygone days of Malla Rule in the valley, in particular during the reign of Malla Raja (king) named Narendra Malla, Kathmandu Valley suffered from famine due to drought. Lack of rain and water resulted in poor food production leading to shortage of food and famine. The people approached the king with the problem and asked for some kind of solution and help. The king conferred with the priests to find out why the valley was not getting rain; the priests found that Gorakhnath by means of sadhana (tantric power) had captured all the nagas in the valley (Machhendranath uses nagas as agents through which he sends rain) and gone for meditation. They also found out that the meditation was not likely to be broken unless his Guru, Machhendranath appeared before him. There was no chance of rain unless Machhendranath was brought from Assam in India. So it was decided that king Narendradeva of Bhaktapur along with Gubaju Bandhudatta Vajracharya from Kathmandu, and Jyapu (farmer) from Lalitpur, would go and fetch Machhendranath. On the way to their mission, they came upon naga raja Karkotaka\textsuperscript{5} who accompanied them. The priest and naga raja with their tantric prowess were finally able to bring Machhendranath to Kathmandu. Machhendranath through sadhana (tantric power) was converted to a bee and put in a kalas (a jar filled with water and vegetation used commonly in worship); when Gorakhnath heard the arrival of Machhendranath, he broke his mediation in order to pay homage to Machhendranath; the nagas were set free and once again there was rain in the valley.

After the arrival of Machhendranath to the Valley, the question of where the deity should be situated arose. While Gorakhnath and other gods like Brahma and Vishnu who accompanied them started discussing the issue sitting in a place called Hangsikot overlooking the present Bungamati village, Hayagriwa Bhairav in the guise of a dog looked towards the village and started howling ‘bu’, which meant that

\textsuperscript{5} King of the nagas believed to live in Tau Daha, which lies to the southern extremity of the valley and is believed to dwell there even today. People also go to this place for worship when they need rain.
Machhendranath’s temple should be situated at the spot where Bhairav was pointing; because of the sound ‘bu’ produced by Bhairav the place was called Bungamati.

Some residents also say that the original name of the village was Bunga and it was at a slightly higher elevation than where it is today. The name could have developed from the word “Bungaa”, or “Bungala” meaning “spring” or “watering place”. Most Newari villages are found on the banks of river or some watering place. This village has Nakhu River on the east and Bagmati River on the west; so the village must have been originally called Bunga and became Bungamati after Machhendranath was situated in the temple. It is believed that Lord Indra appeared at the place after Machhendranath’s arrival to pay homage to the deity.

These are the various views of some villagers regarding the name of the village. The residents of the village refer to Machhendranath as “Bungadeya”; the original village was moved to where it stands today as directed by Hayagriva Bhairav. So the temple of Machhendranath stands at the center of the village and this area is also known by the name of Amarapur. There is the temple of Hayagriva Bhairav behind the temple of Machhendranath and few chaityas (Buddhist stupas) in the temple bahal (temple compound). Surrounding the temple bahal is the dwelling houses of the majority of Sakya and Vajracharya thars who are priests at the temple. Most of the animal sacrifices at various occasions are performed at the temple of Hayagriva Bhairav because Machhendranath does not accept animal sacrifice according to the priests and people in the village. As per the village folktale, when Machhendranath arrived and settled in Bungamati for the first six months of a year, 100 Newars from Patan, another 100 from Bhaktapur, and still another100 from Kathmandu, took up settlement in Bungamati to take care of the deity. They were believed to be Jyapus from Patan, Sakyas from Kathmandu, and Shresthas from Bhaktapur. For the remaining six months of the year Machhendranath is kept at the Patan temple in Twabahal.

Thus this village although very small is unique for the diversity of jats. The village is also dominantly Buddha Margi as the priests of Machhendranath come from the Buddha Margi. 

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6 According to VDC office record as well as village residents.

7 Source: villagers, VDC office.
Margi Sakya and Vajracharya thars. Hindu Shresthas called Niyekhus paint the Machhendranath image once before the deity is taken to Patan temple and the second time before the annual festival of Machhendranath.

3.2 The Geographical Setting

Bungamati is one of the 41 villages in the Lalitpur district, and lies three kilometers southwest of the district. To the North of the village lie villages of Saibu and Khokana. To the south lie villages of Chhampi and Dukuchhap, to the east Nakhu River and to the west lies the Bagmati River.

Bungamati can be accessed from Jawlakhel town that lies to the west of Patan city by buses and taxis. There are Public buses and taxis going to Bungamati from Jawlakhel center though taking buses can be time consuming as they wait until the bus is overcrowded with people. The village people have a say in this matter as I understand; taxis that do not belong to owners of Bungamati have to pay a fine (about Rs10/-) for taking passengers from Bungamati. There are times when it is difficult to find a taxi that goes to Bungamati; taxi-drivers demand double the usual price because it is outside the city boundary in addition to not getting passengers as easily when returning back to towns and cities. So it is cheaper to go to Bungamati via taxis and buses from the Jawlakhel taxi/bus stand for Bungamati. Taxis are more expensive (Rs. 10/- per person) but faster than buses though over-crowding in both forms of transport is an accepted ritual. About six people are squeezed into a taxi, when it should be carrying a maximum of four; the taxi’s route into Bungamati involves going west passing the Tibetan refugee camp, past the ring road (which runs round the Kathmandu city) and heads on westward passing Nakhu jail\(^8\) on to the newly built Nakhu bridge over the Nakhu River.

\(^8\) In the Rana and Panchayat rule, politicians fighting for democracy were kept in this jail; some of them have become the heads of the state and members of ruling parties over the ten years of democracy in the country and some have died.
Figure V: Map of Bungamati village. Adapted from Danish plan of Bungamati
According to the old inhabitants, the Nakhu River, some twenty or twenty five years ago, was very clean and could be used for drinking purposes. This is not so today because of overpopulation that has polluted the river. Although the water is dirty I still see people coming to the river to perform purification rituals for the dead, and also other rituals which require river water (as it is regarded sacred and pure); these rituals include bathing to purify oneself or ones associated with certain festivals, e.g. at teej.

Unfortunately, the river is also used for dumping garbage, cleaning motor vehicles and washing wool for carpet factories, leaving the river heavily polluted at the lower end when it reaches Nakhu locality. The river provides water for washing and bathing for the villagers of Bungamati. On either side of the river are paddy fields partly belonging to Bungamati farmers and partly to the farmers of surrounding villages. In addition, the river also provides irrigation through Bhorle and Dhanabu kulos (irrigation canals) to Bungamati farmers.

After crossing the Nakhu bridge the road ascends westward into an area called Sainbu, where I live; further up is Bhaisepe and then Khokana village -- a Maharjan (Jyapu) village, before the road reaches the peak point called Hangsikot. There is a huge pipal tree on this wide elevated area from where we can see the Bungamati village and the roof of Machhendranath temple. There are a couple of small shrines in addition to a stone shrine, and this is where the team that brought Machhendranath in a kalas (vessel filled with water and vegetation) is believed to have stopped to discuss the dwelling place for Machhendranath. From this point, the road slopes downwards towards the village. Though a little narrow, it is a good metal road, which is prone to landslides at least on one side. Last monsoon (1999) a landslide hit the road heavily and there was a lack of transport into the village for a few weeks following the landslide. The road department has managed to make it motorable although there is still a lot of work to be done to avoid landslides in the next monsoon season. On the left side of the road at the entrance of the village, we can see rice fields and the Nakhu River, while the right side the village is

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9 A three-day festival of women that ends on the fifth day of the brightening moon; women undergo penances and rigid fasting, the severity of which is alleviated by lavish feasts, laughter and dancing in good fellowship with sister devotees. During the purifying ritual, which falls on the third day of teej, a day elapses (in certain years) after the fasting day of teej when women atone female sins especially those of menstrual taboos (like touching a male during menstruation), by long ritual holy bathing in the river. This
populated with houses. After a few minutes ride into the village, we come across a cross road; to the left of the road is a police post, and to the right are small shops, and a small pharmacy that opens only in the evening. Facing the police post is a gravel path leading to the Machhendranath temple.

The main road that leads to the village, branches to the lower part of the village leading to the Newar settlement, and the upper part leading to a Brahman-Chhettri settlement called Chunni Khel. There are two entrances to the Newar settlement: the first one branches from the main road across the police post as already mentioned, leading to what is called Machhendranath bahal (temple compound) surrounded by Newari houses; the other is the continuation of the main road leading to the open square where Bungamati buses and taxis stop (called Jawlakhel), and also leads to the other parts of the village. The dusty and gravelled road of the first entrance leads to the settlement of Bare (Sakya) and Uray (Tuladhar) jat, while the second entrance leads to the settlement of Jyapu (e.g. Maharjan, Dangol) and some Shrestha households; the other Newar jats are spread among the six wards and they are in minority. There are also one or two non-Newar households in these six wards.

Beside the police post, is a health post where villagers get limited free medical aid. In the whole village, there are about 7 schools (primary and secondary); five of them are government-run, one is cooperative and one is private. There is also the Bungamati postal service and many associations like the youth club, the Reyukai Nepal (a Buddhist association from Japan), and an agricultural cooperative center.

3.3 A Tour Through The Village

I will be concentrating on the first six wards as they form the bulk of Newar settlement of Bungamati. As I enter the village through the dusty and gravelled path (which becomes muddy and slippery in the monsoon), I can see a few modern buildings in the background in the midst of the traditional Newari buildings. The first dusty lane leads to the first three wards 1, 2 and 3, and continues through many narrow dirty paths leading to the other three wards of Newar settlement, finally come out to the public square on the Maharjan festival is for a happy and productive marriage, finding a good husband and his long life. This festival is not common among the Newars; it is mostly observed by the Parbatiya Brahman, and Chhetri groups.
side of the settlement where buses and taxis are available to go to town. On the way to
the Machhendranath temple, there are small shrines and stone images of gods scattered
around in a few places.
The first entrance leading to the temple is made up of big slabs of black and gray stones
where the dusty and gravelled path ends. According to the villagers, there was once a
gate where the stone path started, built when Machhendranath was brought to the village.
The village development committee would like to rebuild the gate as soon as they can
finance it. Just in front of where the gate was supposed to be, are ponds on either side; the
two ponds on either side of the entrance leading to the temple is seen as the symbolic
expression of auspiciousness (two vessels filled with water “Purna Kalasa”, one on
either side of a door or entrance is regarded as a symbol of good will, and auspiciousness
for those entering and leaving a threshold among most Nepalese). The narrow stone lane
leads into the temple of Machhendranath (Bungadeya to Bungamati Newars), and also
branches off to the other partly stony, partly gravelled, dusty and muddy lanes, leading to
different sections called “wards” of the village. On both sides of the lane, there are rows
of closely lined brick houses with tiled roofs, each house sharing a wall with the other.
This is a typical Newar building structure that is not found among the Parbatiya building
structure. As we reach ward number 2, there is another big pond. According to the
villagers, this pond is used by the three wards (wards 1, 2, and 3) for the purification
rituals, especially in death. Normally, people go to the river to perform various death
rituals, but having a pond near the dwelling houses makes it easier for the people to use it
on such occasions. Another pond exists for use by wards 4, 5, and 6 for such rituals.
While entering the village, a few new modern buildings (brick and cement) can be seen in
the midst of the old structures. There is also a modern structure coming up in the
compound that houses the temple of Machhendranath. The village headman was
expressing his sorrow at this new development; he is of the view that the old building
structure should not be destroyed especially in the main temple complex. Most old houses
are three or four storeys in structure; this is another feature typical of Newar houses.
Plate 1. (Left) Rows of houses (ward no. 2) on both sides of the stone path leading to Machhendranath temple (Middle). (Right) We can see the two chaityas on the LHS of the rightmost picture.

In addition to being the seat of Machhendranath (Bungadeya), this village retains the traditional Newari characteristic of compact density with traditional houses and has become an important tourist destination in the Kathmandu valley. The settlement exhibits the mandalic model of town conceptualization; the center of importance is the temple of Machhendranath; high-ranking Buddhist thars like Sakya, and Vajracharya houses surround its immediate vicinity. Their settlement is followed by Buddhist merchant thar, Tuladhars, the next in rank, followed by the Maharjans (farmer group) and Siva Margi merchant thar Shresthas. The other Newar jats are few in number and scattered among these settlements. On the southern outskirts of the village, we find two cremation grounds (one for Sakya, Vajracharya and Tuladhars and the other for the rest of the Newar jats) on the banks of Bagmati with the temple of Vishnu Devi; the cremation ground is about 45 minutes’ walk from the Bungamati village. The Shrine of eight mother goddesses (Astamatrika) is also situated on the southern outskirts of the village in a place called Kotwal Daha where rain rituals are performed in times of drought.

The village has a number of public water taps, one in every ward for domestic use. Some houses have water pipes taken to their homes but most households use the Nakhu river or public water taps for washing, bathing and drinking water as one need not pay taxes for use of water from public sources.
The drainage system is very poor in most wards; wards 1, 2 and 3 fare better because the chiefs of these wards are trying their best to improve the system although they have very little fund for it. Many households rear goats, ducks and a few others still rear buffaloes. I did not see any rearing of chickens in wards 1, 2, and 3, as Sakyas and Tuladhars consider chicken, polluting. In the Maharjan locality there are households rearing chicken and buffaloes. Like most villages in the Kathmandu valley, dirt, dust and lack of drainage system, makes up the total village scene. I consider myself fortunate to be living in one of the villages about 3 km from the town municipality, where the infrastructure is better than most of the villages in Nepal, and where electricity and good supply of drinking water is available. Talking to the village Adhyaksa (chief official) Mr. Prem Bhakta Maharjan, I found that ward 9 has some problem with the supply of drinking water; tensions flare up between wards 7, 8 and 9, because of the lack of sufficient water supply.

3.4 Village Administration

Each village in the valley has a Village Development Committee (VDC, I will be using this short form to refer to it throughout my document) that is responsible for the administrative affairs of the village. The Committee has elected officials and members who are responsible for various developmental and social works in the village. At the head of the Committee, is the village chief official “Adhyaksa” and the assistant chief “Upadhyaksa” elected by the villagers and both are under state employment. The village comprises of nine wards (English official translation of small area unit; twa in Newari; tole in Nepali.); each ward has its own elected ward “Adhyaksa” working under two village chief officials. Besides the Adhyaksas there is a member of the District Development Committee representing the village at the district level; altogether there are about 18 Committee members. The VDC office receives certain amount of budget for one financial year, which is used for developmental work, office and other relevant expenses. In the last fiscal year they received about Nepali Rs.500,000 (equivalent to approximately U.S. $ 7352 at an exchange rate of Nepali Rs.68 to a USD $1; this is a very recent development). This budget is divided between the nine wards; I was told that each ward received around Nepali Rs. 40,000/- to Rs.50,000/- for infrastructure and other developmental work. The Adhyaksas stated that nothing much could be done with so little
money. The lack of finance and uncooperative attitude of the villagers make it doubly hard to make any progress on developmental work. The VDC officials solve most of the problems in the village regarding petty quarrels with regards to water and other household problems among the villagers. In case the problems get complicated, it is taken to the District Court.

The wards are not only units of administration, but also have some of the qualities of “urban village” with close personal contacts between its members. The first six wards are almost entirely dominated by the Newars; the seventh and eighth wards (Parbatiya Brahman and Chhetri settlement) lie on the upper part of the village separated from the other wards by a metallic road. The ethnic group known as Tamags are mostly found in the 9th ward of the village the ward lies to the south of Bungamati Jawlakhel. The population data according to the VDC office is approximately 6000\textsuperscript{10}; the majority of the population belongs to the Newar thars like Maharjan, Sakya, Tuladhars, Shresthas, and Vajracharyas. About 70% of the people speak Newari, 25% Nepali and 5% Tamang, according to the village record.

3.5 Village Economy

About 15 to 20 years ago, agriculture was the only source of income to most villagers, and animal husbandry was common. Today, animal husbandry is confined to a handful of households. Most of the villagers said that lack of space, difficulty in finding grazing pastures, and reluctance to do hard work when they had other alternative means to earn money with less physical effort, resulted in the lack of animal husbandry in the village.

With the promotion of tourism in the country, woodcraft has become a common occupation in the village especially among the Sakyas and Tuladhars. In recent years some of the Jyapu sub-group like Maharjans have also learned the craft and opened up workshops in the village. Those in the business informed me it was the easiest way to earn a livelihood or start a business, because it needed little investment. Among some Sakya and Tuladhar households, women are equally involved in the woodcarving business along with their husbands, fathers and brothers, thus being self-employed. We

\textsuperscript{10}This is not a recent census; I understood from the ex-Pradhan Pancha that there is a need to make a new population survey in the village.
can see how widespread the woodcraft business is when we enter the village especially along the entrance of the temple, which is mostly the Sakyas and Tuladhars settlement. According to the village office, there are about 200 or smaller woodcraft business in this village. Most of the educated villagers work in the cities of Patan, and Kathmandu as labourers, construction and office workers. There are only a few with higher-level educational or professional degrees left in the village as most of them have moved to the city. A few Tibetan carpet factories can be seen in the village; these factories have given employment to the village girls. In my survey I found that most married women did not take any employment outside their household where they are heavily involved with domestic chores and agriculture; those working in the carpet factory are mostly unmarried girls. Almost 100% of the villagers depend on income from other sources than agriculture.

Because agriculture is still a major part of their lives almost all households have landholdings, but only a small percentage of the population sells agricultural products. The majority of households use agricultural products like rice, potatoes, garlic and maize for self-consumption resulting in self-sufficiency. The agricultural fields are in active use throughout the year; I found women working in the fields, and men engaged in tilling the ground with short-handled hoe (*kodali* in Nepali; *ku* in Newari).

Plate 2. (Left) Tuladhar man and his assistant working in his woodcraft shop. (Right) Sakya mother and daughter working in their woodcraft shop.
Chapter 3

During the monsoon season (starting May-June) rice is planted; it is harvested in the months of October-November. Maize is grown in higher elevated grounds as it needs less water. In winter, potatoes, onions, garlic and other winter vegetables are planted. According to VDC documents, about 10% of the villagers are below the poverty line. The Irrigation Committee records show that most of the members of farmer (Jyapu) jat and those jats above farmer jat possess a home (however small) and some agricultural land. Those who fall below the poverty line tend to be from lower groups like Kusle, Pore, etc.
Chapter 4

4 RELIGIOUS IMAGERY OF THE BUNGAMATI LIFEWORLD

The people of Bungamati live in a world of religious traditions associated with Siva Margi and Buddha Margi as well as of ancestral cults, witchcraft beliefs, and spirits of different kinds. These traditions are expressed in a bewildering number of images in the form of named “gods” and “goddesses” represented in sculptures, paintings and prints adorning homes and public places, which people in daily life worship or address with respectful behaviour. Reflecting on my fieldwork I see that I should have paid more attention to time spent in observing such behaviours and the particular forms they take for different categories of people. In order to give an impression of this world of imagery, I will give a descriptive account of some of the major images and some stories connected to them. I will also try to indicate how worship of these images is related to different social categories. Most importantly I will point to the public ritual places, which are of central importance in worship.

In Bungamati, there is little distinction between followers of Siva Margi and Buddha Margi in everyday social life. Most villagers worship in both Hindu and Buddhist temples and the forms of worship are rather similar.

4.1 The Machhendranath Temple

The central ritual focus of Bungamati is the Temple of Machhendranath. To the villagers, Machhendranath is known by the name “Bungadeya”; the name is derived either after the village founded at the spot where Bhairav howled “bu” (birthplace) according to Wright (1972), or from the word “bungaa” meaning “watering place” or “spring” like the explanation of the name of the village. Nepali (1965) and several residents in Bungamati offer the second derivation. Bungadeya has many important mythological, historical and contemporary ritual associations with water. These associations have led Slusser (1982) and Levi (1905) to suggest a theory of Bungadeya being a primordial rain god, who was later identified with the benevolent Avalokiteshvara. Machhendranath is also known by the name of “Karunamaya” meaning an embodiment of love and kindness like a mother figure. While Bungamati Newars refer
to Machhendranath as *Bungadeya*, Newars from other parts of the valley use the name *Karunamaya* to refer to Machhendranath.

Non-Newar Nepalese do not use the Newari names of *Bungadeya* or *Kaurnamaya* but refer to the deity as Machhendranath. Machhendranath’s identity as *Padmapani*, *Lokeshvara*, and *Avilokiteshvara* is widely known to *Bare jat* and other Buddhists with special interest in the god. I will not discuss the evolution of the identities of *Bungadeya* as *Padmapani*, *Lokeshvara*, or *Avilokiteshvara* and Machhendranath here; Father John Locke has done an extensive work in this area (See Locke 1980). Instead I will focus on the importance of the deity to the people of Bungamati and the valley as the giver of rain and god of harvest. Bungamati has a dominant Buddhist population consisting of Vajracharya, Sakya, and Tuladhar thars; Maharjan thar belonging to *Jyapu jat* is said to be *Buddha Margi* in Lalitpur because they use *Gubaju/Guruju* (Vajracharya priest) as their household *Purohit* (domestic priest). In Bungamati I found Maharjans using *Gubajus* as their household priests but they also celebrated all the Hindu festivals like the *Siva Margi* Newar, which the other Buddhist groups using Vajracharya priests for their household *purohit* did not. So I feel that Maharjans (*Jyaput jat*) in Bungamati are not exclusive followers of either *Buddha Margi* or *Siva Margi* as may be the case in some other Lalitpur villages.

The *Buddha Margi* Newars identify Machhendranath with *Padmapani*—the divine *Boddhisatwa* who created the present world. The Sakyas believe that they are the descendants of Swayambhunath (a manifestation of the supreme ‘God’ Adi Buddha) who appeared in the form of a flame on a lotus flower when the Valley was still a lake.

The *Buddha Margi* also make use of images generally associated with Hindu traditions, e.g. the Hindu triad of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar (Siva) that are placed on the top of Machhendranath temple. Many anthropologists working among the Newars have also mentioned this aspect of Newar Buddhism. Besides the symbol on the temple there are also shrines around the temple depicting the triad.

Machhendranath is important not only among the Buddhist Newars but among all Newars in the valley. Because of the geographical location and the valley’s dependence on its own production of food for survival, Machhendranath was and is fulfilling an important role in the Newari society as the provider of rain and grain. Many Newars from
different parts of the valley come to the Machhendranath temple in Bungamati to pray for rain and grain (rice), though they currently rely to a large extent on imported rice and other agricultural production.

Unlike most of the deities in Nepal that are either male or female, we find Machhendranath to be both. The various stories of Machhendranath point to the fact that the deity is male during the actual worship, while the adornment of the deity indicate that people associate the deity with female aspects as well. Moreover, Machhendranath undergoes both the male and female initiation rituals like the Bratabandha / Bare Chhuyigu (male initiation rites), and the Barha and ihi (female rites) before the festival takes place. The Bungamati temple is referred to as "maiti / tha chem" (mother’s home) when the deity is installed in the temple after the annual festival. The name “Karunamaya” referring to mother’s love also shows the female aspect of this deity. Nobody was very clear on this dual aspect of the deity; it could be that the deity was originally female as some anthropologists have pointed out or it could be that since Machhendranath played a vital role as the provider of rain and grain to the people of the valley, the deity symbolizes both parts of the human life or society (male and female) vital for the survival and continuation of human life.

Machhendranath has two temples - one in Bungamati, also called Amarapur and the other in Tah Bahal, Patan. The winter is spent in Bungamati and summer in Patan. There are thirty-one priests known as Panejus (belonging to Sakya and Vajracharya thars) who take care of the temple and the annual national festival of Machhendranath Jatra. According to these priests they are an association of 32 priests belonging to a guthi (association) called Battish Paneju Samgha. According to them the 32nd Paneju is Machhendranath himself. So the Panejus are in rank high above the ordinary Newar layman. The land and property of Machhendranath temple guthi almost equals that of Pashupatinath according to the priests of the temple.

There is also another Machhendranath in Kathmandu (Seto Machhendranath) but the popularity of this deity does not equal that of Bungadeya, also known as Rato Machhendranath.

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11 Maiti or tha Chem (natal home) is used only in reference to the females in the Nepali/Newari society.
4.2 Buddhist Monasteries

Besides the Buddhist temples, there are many monasteries known as bahas or viharas where Sakyas and Vajracharyas are members although they are not celibate monks. In the Newar society the celibate monks are not very common although all Sakya and Vajracharya males undergo monastic initiation (Bare Chhuyigu literally meaning becoming of a Bare) and become ‘vikshu’ for four days asking for alms from relatives. In Bungamati, the Buddha vihara is very small and simple. It does not have the prominent features of a bahal like the Kwa Bahal. It contains a huge brass idol of Buddha presented by Thailand and does not have a Tantric shrine because the Machhendranath temple known as Machhendranath Bahal or Amarpur has all the features of bahal. All the socio-religious activities like initiation rituals and other religious activities for the Buddha Margi villagers take place in this temple bahal. In the Buddha vihara, there is a women’s committee that takes charge of the nitya puja (daily worship) and special bhoye (feasts) on Buddhist festivals. There are also few living quarters used for guest vikshus who are invited to stay during the three monsoon months when they observe a non-movement fasting. However, no monastic initiation or other Buddhist rituals are performed here; all the initiation rites for the Bare and other rituals are performed at the Machhendranath temple. Some village men, mostly Vajracharyas, Sakyas and Tuladhars are involved in the administrative part of the vihara. Although Sakyas and Vajracharyas in Nepal do not practice permanent celibate monasticism, there is a group of Sakyas in the village known as the Brahmacharya Sakyas who were originally monks. As per the Bungamati residents they got tired of the life of brahmachari (celibacy), got married and changed to householders. There are about 35 households of Brahmacharya Sakyas in Bungamati; according to the Panejus (temple priests), these Sakyas are not eligible to be the priest (Paneju) of Machhendranath temple. The change of their state from brahmachari (celibacy) to householder could be the lack of importance given to the monastic institution in the social life of Newars. Recently these viharas are receiving lot of attention from Buddhist countries like Japan, Thailand.
4.3 Hindu Divine Images

Of the Hindu gods, Siva occupies the highest place as we can see from the name Siva Margi given to the Hindu Newars. There are many temples dedicated to Siva around the valley, with the most important and sacred being Pashupatinath in Kathmandu. He is regarded as the guardian-deity of Nepal; this deity is usually worshipped in the form of a phallus. The tall stone-phallus located at Jaisi Dewal Tole (locality in Kathmandu) is embraced and worshipped by Newari women from different parts of the valley, desiring to have a child. To the Hindu Newars, Pashupatinath (another name for Siva) is the protector as well as giver of prosperity. In Bungamati there is no temple or shrine dedicated to Siva. The Sakyas and Vajracharyas in Bungamati do not worship Pashupatinath as a supreme god, although they venerate him and may occasionally visit his shrine. To them Machhendranath is all the faces of gods and Machhendranath is also Siva. There is also a day when Machhendranath and Pasupatinath exchange their crowns and the Newars in Bungamati explain this feature through a myth that I will not go into in this thesis.

Among the higher Hindu deities, Vishnu also occupies a prominent place. To the Newars, he is popularly known as Narayan Deya. There are many temples dedicated to Vishnu or Narayan in the valley; some important ones are Changu Narayan, Vishanku Narayan, and Bula-Nil-Kantha Narayan. While the Hindu Nepalese legend depicts Vishnu converting the lake into Kathmandu, the Buddhist legend of Manjushri paying homage to Adi Buddha and converting the lake into the valley is more common and popular in Bungamati. There is no temple of Vishnu in Bungamati but the symbol of the triad -- Brahma, Vishnu and Maheshwar can be seen on the top of Machhendranath Temple; the triad is also depicted in the chaityas around the temple square. Narayan (another name for Vishnu) is generally represented as resting on a bed of serpents with their hood spread over his head or in a standing posture and he is also a kul (lineage/clan) deity of many Newars.

Krishna (an incarnation of Vishnu) is venerated especially by Hindu Newars. The principle temple dedicated to Krishna is the Krishna Mandir in Patan. On the birthday of Krishna (Krishna asthami) the temple is open for the public for worship. The Newars call it Krishna pratara and is popular among the Jyapu Newars especially in Patan, Kirtipur, and
Panga; according to the local tradition they are supposed to be the ancient abode of cowherds. In Bungamati, Krishna jatra is celebrated among the Maharjans (Jyapu jat). There is a small house (music guthi) in the Maharjan twa (ward) of the village decorated for celebration of Krishna Astami. Krishna’s image is placed in the house and children gather around the house for singing and dancing throughout the night; the following day, children take the idol of Krishna around the village. In the Sakya and Tuladhar wards there is no such celebration. This is one stark difference I noticed between the two groups of Newars in Bungamati. The other difference is that Maharjans using Gubaju as their household priests celebrated Krishna Astami while the Sakyas and Tuladhars also using Gubaju as their household priests, did not.

Rama (another incarnation of Vishnu) worship is not common among the Newars of the valley and very few temples are dedicated to him. Since Rama worship is not popular, Hanuman worship does not have much of a place in the Newar society as a whole. In Bungamati, however, Rama and Hanuman are not worshiped although Hanuman is acknowledged and accepted in the society’s ritual ceremony. During the Mohini festival (the worship of Durga) which is celebrated for four to five days in the village, the traditional ceremony called “Hanuman Jagaune” seem to be a prominent feature of Mohini (Dashain in Nepali) in the village.

The next set of deities regarded as ones of lower order (G.S.Nepali, 1965), are the most important in the everyday domestic lives of Newars in the village, towns and cities in the valley. They are Ganesh, Kumar, and Bhairavi in various manifestations. Ganesh is the most important among these deities to both Hindu and Buddhist Newars. There are many temples dedicated to Ganesh; every Newar village, town, or locality will have a Ganesh shrine or temple or a Ganesh idol in their homes even though they may not have the other higher deities like Siva and Vishnu. Some of the Principle temples are Surya Vinayak in Bhaktapur, Siddhi Vinayak at Sankhu, Asoke Vinayak in Kathmandu. In Bungamati, there is a Ganesh temple in Karya Vinayak, which is open every Tuesday and Saturday, and people from different parts of the valley come to the Ganesh temple for worship. The priest of the temple is of Tuladhar thar and so are the assistants. Gubaju or Achaju serve the majority of the Ganesh temples but in Surya Vinayak, the priest is of the low Pore thar. There is another Ganesh shrine in the Maharjan part of the Bungamati village. The
importance of Ganesh can be seen from the fact that no domestic ceremony or worship begins without the worship of Ganesh first. Buddhist Newars also give importance to this deity and like the Hindus, their domestic ceremonies begin with the worship of Ganesh first. It is important to note that the worship of Kumar, which is also done first thing in the morning on the doorstep of a Newar home, is for the daily worship routine versus a ceremony where Ganesh is worshipped first. Some residents in Bungamati explained through a myth (most often used by the villagers as a means of explanation) the importance accorded to Ganesh, and why Kumar is worshipped every morning on the doorstep with flowers and *abhir* (vermilion powder):

*Ganesh and Kumar are both children of Siva and Parvati. One day the brothers competed against each other to show their love and reverence to their parents. They were to go to the sacred mountain (a pilgrimage) and come back to pay their homage to the parents; whoever could do so first would be blessed by their parents. Kumar was smart and agile and his vahan (vehicle, means of transport) was a bird; he was extremely confident that he would easily win over his brother who was slow and clumsy, and had a mouse as his vehicle, a vehicle that was too small and slow to carry a heavy Ganesh. So Kumar flew to the mountain but while returning, the bird's wing got stuck on the branch of a tall tree and it took him a while to free it. Ganesh on the other hand knew of his handicap and thought to himself that the greatest pilgrimage is his parents; if he circumambulated his parents he knew that he would have reached all the pilgrimages. Thus he told his parents that they were his greatest pilgrimage and circumambulated them. They were overwhelmed with his devotion and blessed him saying that no worship or ritual can begin without first worshipping Ganesh. When Kumar reached home, and found the blessing his brother had been awarded he was annoyed and thought of a way to outbeat such a blessing. He then hit on an idea; he decided he would sit in front of a household, which would leave no choice for a householder but to worship him first; one could not possibly leave the house to get ‘nilah’ for worship without paying respect to the god at the doorstep, nor enter the household by just walking over him. We see a symbol of worship on the doorstep of most Newar houses regarded as a symbol of Kumar. The Newars worship this symbol*
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at the doorstep before other daily household worship. This worship is common only among the Newars.

Ganesh is generally represented in a sitting posture; the main function of Ganesh is to remove obstacles to human work and he is also a bestower of a good husband or child. Most households in Bungamati have images of Ganesh and they worship him even though they are the followers of \textit{Buddha Margi}. On the other hand, I found very few women in Bungamati performing \textit{vrta} (fasting) on Monday (Siva’s day); this particular \textit{vrta} on Monday however, is common among \textit{Parbatiya} (Chhetri, Brahman) women who perform it for finding good husband or for their husband’s prosperity by worshipping Siva. Newar girls and women in Bungamati, fast and worship on Tuesday, the day of Ganesh for these purposes. Ganesh \textit{Jatra} (festival of Ganesh) is celebrated at different times in different places; in Bungamati it is celebrated on the day that Katmandu celebrates Godhe \textit{Jatra} (horse festival).

Hindus and Buddhists worship Bhairav; to the majority of Newars, worship of this image is along with the image of his consort Bhairavi is very common. The various Bhairav \textit{Jatras} in the valley and the display of Bhairav masks show the importance it plays in the life of Newars. The principal temples dedicated to Bhairav in the valley are Kal Bhairav, Akash Bhairav, Mahakal Bhairav and Bagh Bhairav. In Bungamati, the temple of Hayagriwa Bhairav is located in the Machhendranath \textit{bahal} behind the temple of Machhendranath; Sakya \textit{thar} are the \textit{deya palas} (temple attendants) of this temple. According to them Haigriya Bhairav is the chief of all Bhairavs and regarded as one of the many \textit{roops} (faces) of Machhendranath. He is said to have led the way to Kathmandu while Machhendranath was brought from Assam. He is represented as a fierce god who wears a scalp of a horse on his head and carries chains or fetters. During special festivals we can Bhairav adorned with huge silver chains; these ornaments are not worn everyday. The wheels of Machhendranath \textit{Rath} (carriage), are regarded as four Bhairavs, and sacrifices are made to them during the Machhendranath \textit{Rath Jatra}. In the Hayagriwa temple, animal sacrifices in various ceremonies and rituals or festivals are performed by the \textit{Suwas} (Jyapu ritual officiates); when the Bungamati villagers pray for rain, animal sacrifices are made in this temple as Machhendranath does not accept animal sacrifices. On the 10\textsuperscript{th} day of the \textit{Mohini} festival, Bungamati Newars celebrate Bhairav \textit{Jatra}. 

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Plate 3. Hayagriwa Bhairav temple in Bungamati. Woman bending to worship the deity.

The main Hayagriwa Bhairav has a smaller image that is kept in the godhouse at the temple bahal and is taken out on this day for a procession. Along with Bhairav, the image of Bhairavi is also taken out for the procession. I was told that Bhairavi is actually goddess Manokamana and that during the last three days of Mohini, the Manokamana temple is closed because she is residing in Bungamati; it is only during this period that people can see Bhairavi, because the god house is closed to the public at other times of the year. The Hayagriwa temple is however, open everyday, and most of the sacrifices are made in this temple. Anyone who wishes to offer sacrifices for some personal reason should inform the Suwas in the village and they will perform the sacrifices. On a Gathe Mangal day, a lamb, (Thumba), is sacrificed and the Panejus have a feast at the temple. On Mohini festival, the VDC office sacrifices a buffalo and goats; individual households sacrifice goats or ducks depending on what they can afford. Bhairav is also regarded as the destructive force of Siva and worshipped as a god which presides over physical force besides being symbolized as the divine instrument of locomotion, thus during the Mohini festival wheels of automobiles are offered animal sacrifices, mostly goat. Bhairavs seem to be more closely linked to the life of the Newars than higher form of deity like Siva or Brahma.
Natural features and images associated with the “goddesses” are commonly worshiped among Newars. Rivers are regarded as goddesses and therefore sacred. Both the Buddhist and Hindu Newars worship the higher forms of goddesses like Laximi, Saraswati, and Parvati; among the Hindu Newars, Saraswati commands greater reverence as the goddess of learning and creation. The Buddhist Newars regard Manjushri as the god of learning and crafts. While Laximi is worshipped in almost all-individual houses, Parvati worship is not very prominent among the Newars.

Other images of “goddesses” like Durga, Kali, Kumari, Bhagwati, Ajima, Brahamyani and Indriani, are also worshipped as part of Astamatrika (eight goddesses). These images are worshipped to pacify them in order that one may be spared the calamities, illness and evil. Most of these goddesses are offered animal sacrifices as can be observed in the temple of Guheshwari (a form of Kali) temple where animal sacrifices are offered, as well as in the Kali temple in Pharping. Guheshwari is worshipped in the form of a “hole”;
the Hindus regard it as Uma’s anus and some believe it to be Uma’s vagina. Different parts of Uma’s dead body fell at various places when her husband carried her corpse wandering from place to place in utter bereavement. These places gave rise to pithas (open places of worship for Devis). In Bungamati, households offer worship and sacrifice in pitha on the outskirts of the village on the day of Pitha Puja. It is believed that the Bokshis (witches) also perform this puja (worship) to gain more power. Residents in Bungamati say that they come to the place of worship at night on that day, and dance round the tree, although none of the residents have actually seen them.

In Bungamati, the eight goddesses (Astamatrika) are worshipped in a place called Kotwal Daha, which is about two hours walk, south of the village. The Astamatrika (eight mother goddesses) are venerated with worship and animal sacrifices when calamities occur. Although Machhendranath is regarded as god of rain, the Bungamati villagers go to Kotwal Daha, where the Gubajus pray for about 7 days offering sacrifices to these goddesses besides sacrifices offered to Hayagriwa Bhairav in Bungamati. The villagers

12 Some authors have mentioned “guheswari” as a hole representing Uma’s “anus.” Their arrival at this conclusion could have been because the name “guheswari” comes from the Nepali word “guh”, which means excreta. However, I feel that vagina (yoni) seems to be more apt as an image of Hindu worship, because yoni and linga (phallus) are used as objects of worship. They relate to fertility and female power (sakti). It seems very unlikely that anus has any such symbolism in Hindu worship.
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said that the Prasad (gift from gods, in this case sacrificed meat) of the Astamatrikas from Kotwal Daha has to be eaten in the place itself, it should not be brought home. In fact, anyone who tries to take the prasad home dies by vomiting blood. It is believed to be the malignant power of the Astamatrika that causes such a death. The villagers told me that there has never been a time when such worship has been offered and the village has not received rain. This shows how important the goddesses are to the daily life of the people in the village.

Ajima is most feared by the Newars and the belief in her power to cure illnesses is very strong, especially during the days when smallpox was a big scare and a threat. I heard that people would prefer to worship Ajima rather than get vaccinated. She is also regarded as the goddess of infant diseases. Whenever a child falls sick, most Newars in the village automatically worship this deity. A lady who had worked as a nurse was telling me that some people in the village still have such a great belief in Ajima that they refuse vaccination and medication. I was told that one family in particular shut her children at home when the health clinic people came around introducing the vaccination program in the village. Ajima also has a prominent place among the Buddhist Newars and the principle place of worship is at the temple of Swayambhu. Aji (midwife) acts as a priestess in the domestic worship of Ajima.

In the worship of female divinities, the Newars are unique as they have the practice of worshipping a human being in the form of Kumari. Newar girls regularly worshipped as living Kumaris are found in Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur, Deopatan and Bungamati.

4.4 The Kumari Institution

In Nepal, selected young girls are installed as living goddesses and worshipped as such for many years. The Kumari institution must be understood in the context of the particular symbolic potential of virgin worship in the politics of the Newari kingdoms of Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. In royal rituals, the deity Taleju was venerated as the source of the king’s power. The worship of this goddess was however directed at her earthly manifestation -- a young pre-puberty girl selected from the Buddha Margi Bare jats of Sakya or Vajracharya. The selected Kumari stays in a special house close to the palace where she is entertained until menstruation. The Kumari is a very apt symbol of
purity as well as of the promise of future fertility and prosperity. Fertility and prosperity of the country is also part of the ritual tasks of the king. Receiving prasad from the goddess Teleju through her incarnation Kumari can be seen as a very convincing symbol of the king’s importance in ensuring the welfare of his people. It can also be seen as serving an important integrative function as a Hindu king once a year is symbolically confirmed in his position by a girl from Buddhist jat. It is also reasonable to assume that the Newar Buddhists, by offering their girls as candidates, were thereby acknowledging the King’s right to rule them. The legitimizing role of Kumari was probably increased after the Gorkha conquest since the Shah dynasty took over the Kumari institution. Even today, when the Newar Kumari gives prasad to the Gorkha king she is said to be conferring in him the right to govern the Newars for yet another year. There are stories, which reinforce this view: for e.g. in 1954, the royal Kumari instead of giving her prasad to the reigning king Tribhuvan, gave it to the young Crown Prince Mahendra. Within that year Tribhuvan died of an illness and Mahendra became the King (Anderson 1971:135).

After the conquest, the Gorkha kings were concerned more with Kathmandu and neglected the Kumaris of other two main cities in the valley. So today, the Kathmandu Kumari receives the State level worship by the King and the nation, but the others do not. The Raj Kumari is from the Sakya thar. According to M.R. Allen, Sakya Kumaris are more closely associated with the Hindu Taleju or Durga while the Vajracharya Kumaris have more of a Tantric association with the Vajrayan deity Vajradevi (Allen 1975).

Kumaris are generally selected from the Sakya or Vajracharya groups although in Patan there have been Kumaris from the Jyapu jat too. They are mostly chosen from around five years of age and remain a Kumari until she shows signs of blood in her body. The Kumari should be perfect in her physical appearance; she should not have any scars or marks. The Raj Kumari or the State Kumari has to undergo a tougher test than rest of the Kumaris. The last night of Navaratri (Mohini festival), she is left alone in a room filled with hundreds of sacrificed buffalo heads; if she shows no sign of fear she is fit to be the Kumari. Annually, in the festival of Indra jatra, she is taken out in a Rath round the city and the king pays homage to her. She is regularly worshiped in Mohini festival and is replaced when approaching her first menstruation. She lives separately from her family.
while in the status of Kumari, after which she returns to her family, leads an ordinary life and can marry.

In Bungamati, the Kumari is much younger in age and does not hold the Kumari position for as long a period as Kumaris in Kathmandu or Patan; thus she does not undergo the strict selection procedure, which involves the ideal criteria relevant to the selection of Kumaris in Kathmandu or Patan. She is selected from the Vajracharya families. The position passes preferentially to the oldest of the eligible girls. The present Kumari is about four years old and succeeded her sister. Any wound in the body, fallen tooth, or menstruation, automatically disqualifies the girl and I found that they hold office for relatively shorter period than other Kumaris. They also live with their own families and are not exposed to any drastic changes to life as other Kumaris. Since the period of their Kumari status is relatively short and because they are in the status at a pretty young age, they hardly remember much of it to be affected by that period of life. The father or some other member of the family performs daily puja with simple offerings of rice, flowers and red tika. She should be respected by all family members and should eat first. She lives the life of any other young girl except for wearing a particular hairstyle (all the hair is taken up and tied in a bun); she occasionally attends some special ceremonial rituals like those connected with the Machhendranath worship. The main days on which she appears for public worship are occasions like the first day of Mangsir/Marga (mid-November), the supposed anniversary of the death of Machhendranath. She is dressed in red clothes and jewelry; has her hair done in Kumari style and spends the day sitting on her throne (asan) on a raised and open area beside the entrance to the Bhairav (Hayagriwa) temple. The Vajracharya Paneju first worships Machhendranath and Bhairav, and then offers meat, two loaves of bread and flattened rice to Kumari. Throughout the day, the general population of Bungamati makes the offerings. She also appears publicly on the final day of Gunla Dharma; this ritual goes on for a month starting in Srawan (around mid August) and ending in Bhadra. The Newari musical guthis from different villages and towns of the valley pay homage to Machhendranath for one month. On the last day, these groups offer elaborate worship to Machhendranath, Bhairav and Kumari. The Kumari sits at the entrance of the Machhendranath bahal, dressed in her finery from early morning and leaves in the afternoon. Many Newars from the valley come to Bungamati on this day to
offer worship to Machhendranath, Bhairav and Kumari. The other occasions for such appearances are both in connection with Machhendranath; the first occurs about the time of winter solstice when the Panejus take his image out of the Bungamati temple and carry him to his temple in Patan; the other is after the fourth day of god’s return to Bungamati. Large crowds from Patan and Kathmandu come to see Machhendranath being brought back to the temple.

The greater majority of Bungamati residents, i.e. the Newars as well as some Chhetri and Brahmins come to make offerings to Kumari on auspicious occasions like marriage, boy’s initiation or a girl’s first menstruation (barha) rite. Many also come when someone is sick, especially those suffering from hemorrhage. The present Kumari’s mother told me that no one could cure it except Kumari. When someone has hemorrhage it is called “kumari lageko” in the village, and as soon as the person worships Kumari, he/she will be cured.

Plate 4. Bungamati Kumari sitting at the entrance of the Machhendranath Temple with all her finery on the last day of Gunla Dharma
In Bungamati, there is also an agricultural field called “Kumari khet”; farmers who own khet (paddy field) in this area need to perform a special puja (worship) once a year after the paddy has been harvested. The straws are put together and an image for worship is made, on which animal sacrifice (ducks or goats) is made. The household then has a feast and returns home. No prasad from this worship is brought home; it is eaten in the field since bringing it home causes harm.

While the Kumari has generally been associated with the king’s Palace, she is associated with the central temple of Machhendranath in Bungamati. She is one of the elements who serve to make the ceremonial activities around the Machhendranath temple compelling, and thereby shape processes, which make Bungamati a special form of Newar community.

Bhimsen worship is also popular among the Newars. He is especially popular among the trading thars like the Shresthas and Tuladhars. He is regarded by the Newars as the giver of wealth. In Bungamati, there is no temple or shrine especially dedicated to this deity, but most Tuladhars worship the deity daily in their homes and may visit the temples in other parts of the valley. Levi tells us that the temples and chapels consecrated to Bhimsen are found along the traditional route from India to the Valley.

4.5 Animal Imagery – Nagas, Frogs, Cows

Nagas (serpent gods) are also worshipped among the Newars. Newars refrain from killing serpents because they believe that they are nagas. Nagas are everywhere. When the valley was a lake, the traditional story is that all the nagas lived in the lake. When Manjushri drained the lake, most nagas left the abode except for one Karkotaka Naga who today is believed to dwell in Tau Daha (a big tank in the southern extremity of the valley); it was because of Karkotaka Naga the valley retained its needed water or it would have been completely dry. Traditional story also shows that Karkotaka Naga assisted the team from the Valley on their mission to bring Machhendranath to the Valley. While assisting them to cross the river of acid on their journey to Assam, the last part of the tail touched the acid river and it was cut off. According to the Newars, if a serpent has a flattened tail, it is Karkotaka Naga and it receives the highest honour and veneration. In the event of a drought, peasants also go to the Tau Daha and worship.
Karkotaka. A golden snake is slipped into the *Tau Daha* as part of the worship and the privilege is given to the Panga Newars (G.S. Nepali 1965). *Vasuki Naga* and *Takshaka Naga* are some of the favoured ones in the valley. Besides these main *nagas*, Newars and even non-Newars believe that all streams, rivers, tanks, wells and confluence of rivers are inhabited by *nagas*. Infact, wherever there is a natural collection of water, *nagas* are supposed to be present. Besides being rain givers and providers of water, *nagas* are also regarded as being helpful in other parts of Newar lives because it is believed that they cure illnesses. When one gets rashes in the body, one needs to worship the *nagas* of dirt and the rashes goes away. *Nagas* ensure peace, bestow riches and protect the house. It is therefore a taboo among Newars to kill serpents for they could be *nagas*. Both the Hindu and Buddhist Newars accept the important place of *nagas* in their lives as the providers of water, wealth and protection.

Newars believe that once a year all the *nagas* leave their dwelling place to worship their *Diwali* deities like the Newars and this day falls in the month of *Jaistha* (after mid June); the day is selected by the Newars for cleaning the local wells, as they believe that it would be empty of *nagas*. This day is called Sithinakha.

Although the Newars in Bungamati accept the importance of *nagas* in their lives and have a place of worship, most of the Buddhist Newars do not share the festival of *Nag Panchami*, which involves the worshipping of *nagas* with offerings of milk and parched paddy. Most *Parbatiyas* celebrate this festival even though they do not share the high sentiments for serpents like the Newars. In Bungamati, I found only Maharjans and some Tuladhrs celebrating this festival, besides the Shresthas.

The frog is another reptile that is highly venerated by the Newars, a veneration that is not found in other Nepalese community. Besides Machhendranath and *nagas*, some claim Newars believe that frogs bring rain with their loud croaking noise that makes the lord of rain “Indra” respond with showers of rain. The day propitiated to the frog is called *Byancha Nakegu* (feeding the frog), which falls on the festival of *Janai Purne* in *Srawan* (around mid August). Newars in Bungamati explain this tradition of venerating the frog by farmers through a traditional tale. According to them, the frog is venerated on this day because it saved the lives of farmers in the village from *Ghanta Karna Rakchas* (a demon) who would have destroyed the village. When the *Ghanta Karna Rakchas* entered
the village ready to devour the village, the frog cleverly lured him into the swamp in the paddy field where he lay submerged with only his head protruding out of the swamp. The frog then called the villagers to burn his head; this took place just about 15 days before the *Janai Purne* festival; thus this day was selected to honour the frog for its good deed. During my fieldwork in Bungamati, I did not hear of any frog-worshipping event for the purpose of hailing the rain, but many stated that a frog’s loud croaking is heard by Indra, and the rain falls.

The cow is another venerated animal among both the Hindu and Buddhist Newars. The cow is associated with Laximi. In Bungamati, Newars and other Hindus use cow-dung and cow-urine for ritual purification. The Nepali anthropologist G.S. Nepali (1965) mentions that the veneration of cow by the Newars can be seen in the taboo imposed on the employment of bullocks for ploughing the field. This taboo is not found among non-Newars. He also claims that such a practice would lead to excommunication. I am not sure if I can fully agree with him on the taboo statements, because though I have seen Newars using hoe for tilling the ground, I could not find anyone in Bungamati who agreed that this was done because of the ritual taboo on ploughing. In Bungamati and Lalitpur, many farmers use bullocks for the job when the need arises. As farmers in Bungamati said: ‘we have to hire someone from Danwar village to do the job because we do not have the animals to plough the field’. It could have been that this taboo was there before or in some parts of the valley but very few farmers in Bungamati or its surroundings are aware of such a taboo.

4.6 The Linga-Yoni Symbol

The Newars also worship material objects and symbols like the other Hindus. The erected phallus shaped *Linga* placed in a basin called *Yoni* (vulva) is in Hinduism the most common symbol of Siva. The *Linga* and *Yoni* image are also sacred symbols to most Buddhist Newars; they see *linga* as a symbol of the lotus in which the spirit of Adi Buddha in the form of flame was manifested to Manjusri. *Yoni* is looked upon as the symbol of the sacred spring in which the root of the divine lotus was enshrined. *Buddha Margi* and *Siva Margi* thus confer different meanings to the same sacred object.
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In Bungamati, the rectangular space in front of the Machhendranath temple is considered to be the symbol of all the *tirthas* (pilgrimage spots). This rectangular space is deep and has many bowl-shaped stone structures filled partly with water. It is believed to contain water from the seven seas, and water from all the sacred rivers. If one worships at this place and performs the necessary circumambulation, blessings of all the *tirthas* will be bestowed and the *pap* (sin) will be washed away.

4.7 Ritual Attitudes Towards Natural Objects

The two plants - *Tulsi* and *Peepal* - are sacred for most Hindus in Nepal is not venerated by the Newars. *Siva Margi* Newars venerate the *tulsi* plant like the other Hindus but *Buddha Margi* Newars do not. The *Peepal* tree is not very popular except for the one in Lagankhel, Lalitpur, which is regarded as Machhendranath’s mother. Newars regard most rivers, streams, lakes and tanks as sacred. The various *tirthas* situated on the banks of the rivers, especially on their confluences, serve to show how important these are for the Newars. The situation of most Newar villages, towns and cities on the banks of rivers and streams show the importance they attach to the *tirthas* for their daily life. Many of these sacred rivers are believed to be the incarnation of the female goddess, Bhairavi. Among them Bagmati receives the highest honour from all the inhabitants of the valley. Vishnumati is important for inhabitants of Kathmandu as they depend upon this river for all their domestic rituals. The famous Buddhist pilgrimage site called Lakha *Tirtha* is also situated on its banks. For the villagers in Bungamati, Nakhu and Bagmati rivers are important for domestic and religious purposes.

Both the Newars and the non-Newars regard the rivers and lakes, works of gods and goddesses. They help people’s daily lives in many ways in the form of worldly benefits; it is believed that a dip into these rivers and streams can cure one of illnesses, bring love, peace, good health, abundant harvest, and happiness. Besides worldly benefit, spiritual benefit is also received which is important for every Newar (Hindu and Buddhist) and non-Newar Nepalese as well. A dip into the sacred water, washes *pap* (sin), cleanses and purifies souls essential for life after death. It cleanses and purifies both the physical and spiritual dirt and illnesses.
4.8 Spirits, Demons, Witches And Some Of Their Social Correlates

The most significant Newar divinity that governs their patrilineal group is called *digu deya* (clan deity), and occupies an important place in the determination of Newar kinship. Groups of families believed to have sprung from a common stock worships its own *digu deya*, and an association of these lineage members devoted to the common worship of the clan (*kul)* deity is called *diwali guthi* or *digu deya guthi*.

The aniconic representation of *digu deya* is located in open fields outside the settlement, and is represented by a heap of unadorned stones where the lineage members gather for worship. Though lineages of the same clan generally share the same aniconic image as their *digu deya*, each lineage often has its own *kikimpa*, a crown-like ornament, which is stored either in the home of the eldest member of the *digu deya guthi*, or the responsibility to store the deity may fall on the various members of the *guthi* who take turns in storing it. This ornament is another representation of the *digu deya* and worshipped daily. Lineage members bring the *kikimpa* to the aniconic *digu deya* for their annual *digu deya puja*. The villagers informed me that the stones are just the representation of the iconic image of *digu deya*, which is kept hidden in a special sanctum (*agam*). For Bare (Sakya/Vajracharya) *jat* this *agam* is usually located in their *bahah/bahal*. In Bungamati, Sakyas have their *agam* in Machhendranath *bahal*. For others it may be located in a separate building called an *agam chem* or kept in the oldest house of the clan or *kul chem* (clan house). Some Tuladhars in Bungamati informed me that their *digu deya* is kept in the *kul chem* where the senior most member of their lineage *thakali* lives. Most people I talked to kept the identity of their *digu deya* a secret. The residents in Bungamati told me that the spirit of the god (iconic *digu deya*) is transferred to the aniconic *digu deya* (represented by heap of stones) usually located on the outskirts of the village through *sadhana* (tantric power) so that the *phuki* (lineage) members can worship the deity. Thakali (seniormost member of the lineage or *guthi*) and his wife (*thakali Naikin*) worship the iconic image of *digu deya* kept hidden in the *agam*. Access to the *agam* is open only to those who have taken an initiation or *dikchhya*. Women are usually required to have borne a child prior to receiving an initiation and being admitted to her husband’s *agam*. Some residents in Bungamati told me that Bare *Agam deyas* are
sakti deyas or images, which are depicted as being engaged in sexual intercourse such as Hercakrasamvara or Jogambara. It is mostly the higher jats that have agam deyas, though some lower jats especially those who perform services to gods that require initiation may also have them. Worship for aniconic digu deya involves the offering of animal sacrifice (mostly goats or ducks) followed by a feast at the place of worship. Those unable to afford or not wanting to offer animal sacrifice may offer duck eggs as substitute. It is said that those who worship their clan deity in the agam also offer animal sacrifice.

In every ceremony and ritual, digu deya’s blessing is indispensable. After marriage, the new bride has to be taken to worship digu deya even though the marriage involves elopement without the usual elaborate rituals. Digu deya worship is a manifestation of ancestor worship. Ancestor worship is also manifested in the practice of Buhra Junako after which a person is regarded as a semi divine being and in the terms Aji and Aju (grandfather and grandmother) used by the villagers in Bungamati to designate Bhairav and Bhairavi.

Belief in spirits, ghosts and worship of demons is also common among Newars as it is among the non-Newars of the country. Demon like lakhe, is a household deity of Ranjitkar and worshipped in the form of a mask. Spirits and Bhutas (ghosts) also find their way into the Newar social life in many ways. Every locality has its own bhuta, which lives on a crossroad, and the bhuta is known as chhwasa Ajima. This spirit or ghost has to be kept satisfied with offerings of food, so as not to cause harm to the household.

In every feast, ceremony, and festival Newar households in Bungamati as well as other Newars in the valley offer food at the crossroad. If proper worship and propitiation to the Chhwasa Ajima is not made, people will become ill, lose appetite and may even die. Most infant illness are believed to be caused by Chhwasa Ajima; even today, people in Bungamati, especially females, will not take modern medication before propitiating the spirit.

Preta is a spirit of persons who have met unnatural death, like accidents or suicide, and who are believed to be roaming around the house, village or city. Sikh is another spirit; it is more a family spirit of a dead member who can cause harm to the family (e.g. disease, loss of peace and prosperity) if shraddha (offering of Pindas in the death ritual) is not done in proper order.
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*Kyaka* or *Khya* is another variety of spirit, which is prominent in Newari life. There are two kinds of *khyas*: black and white. The white is regarded as the good one bestowing riches and prosperity while the black one is dangerous. *Khya* is also believed to dwell in houses where a girl during *barha* has died. This *khya* is called *barha khya*. It is believed that persons living in these houses are doomed to be unhappy and death of a spouse is a certainty according to the Newars. While keeping the girl for *barha* ritual, they usually take the soil of the house to the *Gubaju* to see if the house has had deaths relating to *barha*, because it is believed that if it has, it is inevitable that death might occur again. The spirit is said to be that of a girl who dies during *barha* and is buried there in the house, for the body cannot be brought out of the house on such deaths.

Many farmers also fear the spirit that haunts the agricultural field. It is dangerous and illusive because people are usually unaware of it. They become ill and never get cured through medication. If the medicine men *baidya* are not consulted in time, the result is death. The signs that the spirit has possessed a person are shown in the field while planting or harvesting rice. Some Bungamati farmers claim they have suffered from this spirit. One has to be careful about where one plants the paddy. The sign is that although the seed is sown, a big patch of the planted area will show no signs of germination, even it is re-planted several times. If this is overlooked, the owner of the field gets sick, and may result in death. According to a farmer in Bungamati, he got ill because he had ignored the patch of barren area in his field; he never really gave much thought to it until he got ill and no found that no medicine could cure him. He finally went to a *baidya*, who informed him of the spirit of the field. The spirit was then offered worship and food, which had to be cooked at the barren spot; while approaching the field, one should never look back and the offer of worship and food should be done at sunset, and alone. People fear this spirit dwelling in the agricultural field; there are many stories about it in the village.

This case illustrates the general point I have made that when harmful events strike humans, an explanation is sought by relating it to mystical connections with earlier man-nature interactions.

*Bokshi* (one believed to practice black magic) is also greatly feared by Newars and even non-Newars. *Bokshi* is mostly female but there are male *bokshas* too. In the village,
people have many stories to tell about a powerful Boksha whose wife was bokshi and she would cook food by putting her feet in the fireplace. Gathe Mangal festival celebrated mostly by Newars in the valley is believed to be the main day for their evil activities. The Panejus of Machhendranath worship at the temple of Hayagriva Bhairav on this day in Bungamati to ward off the evil influence of bokshis. A thumba (lamb) is sacrificed at the temple, and there is the feast at the temple for the Paneju households. People from Bungamati as well as other parts the valley visit Machhendranath Bahal to worship at the Bhairav temple, and this goes on for an entire day. The villagers also informed me that the day of the Pitha puja in Bungamati is the day when the bokshis dance round the tree that stands at pitha (place of worship for goddesses ‘devis’) at midnight. Bokshis can possess a person, making them either ill or insane. They can also administer potion in the food making a person ill and eventually causing death. Thus the explanation for misfortune is also sought in the bokshi influence and protecting oneself from such influences is an important concern in the village even today.

4.9 Religious Imagery And The Relations Between Siva Margi and Buddha Margi

Coming back to the relation between Siva Margi and Buddha Margi I see a mutual recognition and exchange of beliefs and rituals, and less of conflict. Although the Hindus believe in the power of Siva, Brahma and Vishnu, while Buddhists believe in the power of Adi Buddha, and other higher Buddhist deities, both believe and respect the Hindu deities equally and believe that they are all manifestations of the same God. To the Hindus, the images are manifestations of the higher order Hindu deities while to the Buddhists they are manifestations of higher order of Buddhist deities.

All the Newars participate in the worship of Machhendranath, Ganesh and other deities. There is a Buddha vihara in the village where people come to worship and various Buddhist functions and feasts are held. Women involved in the work of vihara are from various Newar jats like Mali, Jyapu, Uray and Bare. Some of them are also caretakers at Ganesh temple in the village. All the Newari domestic ceremonies and rituals show that Ganesh takes precedence in the worship. The few differences seen in Bungamati between the two religious groups of Newars are that the Sakyas and some Tuladhars in the village do not worship naga on the Nag Panchami day; they do not put up the picture in their
entrance door like Maharjans and Shresthas but they too revere and worship nagas and believe that they are responsible for providing water in the rivers and streams, wells, springs and ponds. The Sakya or Tuladhar wards (twa) do not celebrate Krishna Astami though they may participate in the function in the Maharjan twa.
5 JATRAS AND OTHER FESTIVALS OF BUNGAMATI

The most important element in fostering the idea of a shared community identity is the jatras (festivals), which are staged according to a ritual calendar. The time and resources spent on these festivals is amazing. In the commitment of the different communities to excel in making them spectacular events there is one factor leading to variation in the socio-cultural “patterns” among the Newars. There are a large number of jatras -- festival tours where godly images are carried on a chariot on a ritually prescribed route. The jatras take the name from the image that is carried in the chariot or dooly (palanquin). Some jatras are specific for certain communities; others may be performed in several Newar communities. Whether staging of a jatra is specific for one or for several Newar communities, watching the ritual tour is of concern for Newars as well as non-Newars.

Bungamati like many other Newari villages celebrate many festivals; a number of them are similar to all the Newar festivals of the Valley; some are distinct and are celebrated only in Bungamati, while some festivals celebrated by other Newar localities are not celebrated by those in Bungamati. Every Newar looks forward to festivals, which means feasting as well as perpetuating group solidarity at different levels of jat. I found the same enthusiasm for feasting and celebration in Bungamati as has been reported from other Newar Communities.

I shall briefly sketch the overall picture of the festivals of the Village, giving more details of the ones important to the people of Bungamati, or those festivals, which are uniquely Bungamati. Some of these festivals are common to all Newars and other Nepalese in the Valley and Mary M. Andersen (1988) has given good description of these festivals; I have incorporated some of her description of some festivals into my own. In these festivals and ceremonies, one can also get a feeling of how the substance, water, is symbolically woven into the socio-religious life of the Newars in Bungamati.

5.1 Rato Machhendranath Rath Jatra

It is one of the most important festivals of Bungamati and celebrated annually as a national festival attended by the royal family. The socio-religious life of most Bungamati villagers revolves around Rato (red) Machhendranath usually referred to as Bungadeya by the Bungamati residents. Kathmandu also has a Machhendranath jatra, called Seto
(white) Machhendranath, but the popularity and importance does not equal that of the Rato Machhendranath.

Machhendranath rath jatra (Chariot festival of Machhendranath) is celebrated with great pomp. The festival itself lasts for about a month. On the final day of the jatra, the King and Queen attend the ceremony displaying the bejeweled “bhoto” in the large open field of Jawlakhel\(^{13}\). In Bungamati this festival is not the usual feasting festival for the villagers; it is mainly worshipping and taking the deity around Patan. However feasting (chhwela bhu and bhoye) takes place at the four different halting points of the traditional route of the rath jatra in Patan. The most elaborate feasting is celebrated in Lagankhel. Animal sacrifices are performed at four different places-- Kotwal Daha, Hayagriva Bhairav temple in Bungamati, Phaykwadya located northwest of Swayambhu, and at Maju Sima, the shrine of Bungadeya’s mother in Lagankhel. These sacrifices are performed secretly. After these sacrifices, Maha Bali (the great sacrifice) is performed in front of Bungadeya’s rath in the dead of night to avoid gathering of curious people. The series of sacrifices on this night lasts for over five hours, and is the bloodiest sacrifice of the jatra. On the last day of the jatra, many worshippers from Bungamati as well as other parts of the valley gather in Jawlakhel field for worship; they may bring food like flattened rice, and curry, and they drink and eat together (after worshipping Machhendranath) while waiting for the display of bhoto. The majority of the feasting takes place among the Panejus and various groups connected with the ritual of the jatra.

The preparation of the jatra starts way ahead of the day that the rath jatra begins. The imposing rath (chariot) takes weeks to be assembled, and the assembly is done in Patan annually. When the jatra ends, the rath is dismantled and the building blocks of the rath are stored for the following year; but every twelfth year, the rath is assembled in Bungamati and the jatra starts from Bungamati, heads into Patan and finally returns to Bungamati. At the end of this twelfth year jatra, the rath is destroyed completely except for the great curved timber shaft, which is an auspicious and coveted object and the property of Machhendranath guthi. In the jatra, the shaft represents Karkotaka (the king.

\(^{13}\) Locke (1980) notes that this area is also named after an aspect of the rath jatra. “Ja hwala khya” means “field of scattered rice” in Newari, the “khel” suffix being a result of the influence of Nepali. The word khel may have been derived from the word khet, meaning rice field. Locke has written that khel means field, in Nepali.
of serpents), while the four wheels of the chariot are the four Bhairavs who accompanied Machhendranath carrying *purna kalasa* (vessel filled with water and vegetation like flowers, leaves or plants which contain his spirit “*atma*”). On the tip of the shaft, the main Bhairav (Hayagriwa) presides, leading the way for the *rath*. Machhendranath is seated on the chariot and a Jyapu assistant (*Suwa*) covers his head with a decorated umbrella. The chariot is filled with the symbolic presence of the original Jyapu beneath god’s seat, while Bandhudatta (tantric priest) and Narendra deva (King of Bhaktapur) are positioned one on each feet. At the tip of the chariot’s spire are Vajrasattva, Machhendranath’s guru, and his spiritual father Amitabha. Surya (associated with the sun), Brahma, Siva, Visnu, and Garuda (vehicle of Vishnu) are also present.

While the chariot is assembled, the deity also undergoes various preparations for this festival. After six months in Bungamati, the deity is taken to Patan around *Mangsir* (Nov-Dec). Machhendranath underdoes the tantric rituals of death (removal of the life spirit from the image and transfer to a silver pot “*kwam*” through meditative powers “*sadhana*”) and birth (installation of the spirit back to the image after being bathed and repainted) performed by the Vajracharya priests and their assistants. These rituals are not performed under the view of spectators.

The bathing ceremony takes place at the Lagankhel platform annually attended by thousands of spectators. However, on the twelfth year, it is performed in Bungamati. The *peepal* tree in Lagankhel where the bathing ceremony is performed, symbolizes the deity’s mother and thus plays a vital role in the annual festival.

The bathing water is placed into four silver vessels into which the *nagas* were invoked during the “*kalas puja*” (performed earlier).

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14 She was transfixed to the tree by Bandhudatta when he realized that she was hiding in the tree and had come to take Machhendranath

15 In the *kalas puja*, a deity is summoned through *sadhana*, into a water vessel (*kalas*). The nature of the presence of a god (or gods, as more than one god may be summoned) afforded by this *puja*, permits access to the god’s powers and provides the opportunity to make offerings directly. Locke (1980) points out that *kalas pujas* are often performed in front of the images of the gods invoked. This *puja* is performed by the priest and *jajaman*

16 According to the *panejus* in Bungamati, the water for this purpose is brought from a well in Bungamati, called nhawan gha, after its association with the bathing ceremony. This well is purified for 15 days, by not allowing anyone to draw water from this well. Some say that there is a tradition that the water is brought from the well in Itum Bahal. Locke (1980:262) states that the water is brought from the well in Ta Bahal.
belonging to high-\textit{jat} Hindu Shresthas) paint the image of Bungadya once in Bungamati before leaving for Patan, and once before the annual \textit{jatra}. During the period of painting, \textit{Niyekhus} maintain a state of purity, taking care not to touch anyone else, and fast each day until the day’s painting is done. They, along with \textit{Panejus}, circumambulate the deity six times, while the main \textit{pujari} (ritual priest) performs dancing \textit{mudras} facing outwards into the eight directions in worship of the \textit{naga} deities. After the circumambulation, the water bearers place the silver water urns on their shoulder and at a signal from the main priest, they douse the image with the contents of their urns. Players of long processional horns blow their instruments and the \textit{Gurujuya Paltan} fire two shots in the air. Some of the bath water is retrieved in a large tray placed at the bottom of the image and those at the platform spray the crowd with the retrieved water as it then takes the form of \textit{prasad}. People eagerly move forward to receive the blessing.

After the birth rituals are performed, the ten-fold initiation (\textit{dasa karma puja}) rites are also performed. The initiation rites include birth-associated rituals like rice feeding, the male (\textit{Hindu Bartabanda and Buddhist equivalent initiation rites}) and female (\textit{barha and ihi}) initiation rites, advanced initiation rights for the Vajracharyas, and other rites of passage.

When all these rituals and the assembly of the \textit{rath} are complete, Machhendranath (Bungadeyo) is almost ready to be seated in the \textit{rath}. Before the seating of the deity, \textit{Panejus’ Dasa Karma Puja} is performed. This auspicious day is also considered as “Mother’s Day” (\textit{maya kwa swaye}). The two \textit{Panejus} -- \textit{jhal} and \textit{khal} (attendants of Machhendranath while in the \textit{rath}) participate in these rites. The principal \textit{pujari} accompanied by \textit{suwa} (Jyapu ritual assistant)\footnote{\textit{Suwas} are high \textit{jat} Jyapus who traditionally cook food at feasts. Originally there were eight \textit{suwas} in Bungamati rotating the responsibility of serving in various capacities during rituals associated with Bungadya. The most common task performed by \textit{suwas} is sacrificing animals, excluding buffaloes. They also assist in the initial ritual of Sakya and Vajracharya males by holding the ritual umbrellas over the head of the initiates. Today the number of \textit{suwas} in Bungamati has reduced to just three.} and others, head towards Kotwal Daha (a natural pool lying south of Bungamati) to pay their homage to Machhendranath’s mother, and to bring back Machhendranath. Various \textit{pujas} and animal sacrifice are performed. It is believed that it was at this point that Machhendranath’s mother and her fellow inhabitants of Kamarup turned back after receiving gifts from Bandhudatta. Kotwal daha
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is also regarded as a point at which Bandhudatta summoned Machhendranath in the form of a bee into a *kalas* (vessel with water and flowers/plants used for worship). Both events are re-enacted in Kotwal Daha. The residents of Bungamati regard Kotwal Daha as Machhendranath’s *tha chem* (natal home) while those in Patan regard Bungamati as Machhendranath’s *tha chem*. After completing the pujas and rituals, the procession then brings back Machhendranath in the *kalas* following the course of the river, and actually wading in the river at some points to put off the followers from Kamrup. Residents along the way wait with containers, hoping to receive a bit of water from the *kalas* in which Machhendranath is believed to be present. The procession finally reaches Ta Bahal and is welcomed by the wife of the eldest *Paneju* (*Paneju thakali*). This marks the completion of the transformation of image to “god”.

It is in the afternoon of this auspicious day (also known as *kotwal daha* mela) and in the company of the members of the *rath* procession that Machhendranath is brought to the *rath* in Pulchowk and placed inside.

Plate 5. A Woman touching and worshipping the *rath* while it stops in Lagankhel
Machhendranath is seated in the *rath*, and the two *Panejus* take residence in the *rath* till late afternoon on the first day of the bright lunar fortnight of *Baisakh* (April-May). Besides the *Panejus*, the Patan Kumari is also brought in a procession to be present everyday. In the procession, the descendent of the Patan Malla king carries the ceremonial sword of his ancestors. In many of the Machhendranath rituals like ‘*dasa karma puja*’, the sword representing the Malla king is present. Descendants of Narendradeva of Bhaktapur do the same in addition to bearing the silver foot cover of Machhendranath on his head.

Before the procession starts, *ghakus* (responsible for steering and stopping the *rath*) offer the first of series of sacrifices to the *rath* wheels (where the wrathful Bhairavs are believed to be embodied). Moving the *rath* requires several hundred people and is filled with tension, hard physical labor in terms of getting the *rath* to move in the required direction, and also violence fueled by consumption of rice beer (such festivals are also regarded as times to settle old scores). The sheer size of the *rath* and the dense mass of people singing and dancing, loud music from the traditional instruments, and wild spirit accompanying it cause many mishaps. During the latest twelfth year celebration, two people died as bricks from a half constructed building fell on them while they were struggling among the crowd for a better position to view the *rath* and the god. As people struggle to get a chance to pull the *rath* (it is considered auspicious to be able to do so), there are others who want to earn merit by providing water to the participants of the festival. Most women stand along the route with water vessels, giving water to the thirsty who are engaged in pulling the cart, playing the music, and other participants. People with water vessels during such festivals or processions, is a common sight in the valley.

The successful course of the chariot festival is particularly ominous. It is believed that if there is series of mishaps like axles breaking frequently, wheels becoming mired or other mishaps, there is in store a high quota of misfortune. There are examples of the misfortune that occurred in the past; e.g. in Yoganarendra's last year of life, the twelfth year festival was fraught with ill omens; axles breaking frequently causing delays on the schedule of the *jatras*. Another king is said to have died soon after the evil omens appeared, because when he assisted in pulling the *rath*, the axle broke more than thirty-one times. When such mishaps occur, animal sacrifices are performed at the mishap...
locations to propitiate the Bhairavs who reside in the wheels. Recently there was mishap on the day the procession started; it had barely covered just a few kilometers when the top part of the *rath* broke. The *jatra* was delayed for about several weeks; people feared that it would be a bad year. A lot of sacrifices pacifying the various gods were made, but some technical rethinking by making the upper part of the *rath* shorter enabled the procession.

From the contemporary practice of this festival and the legend of Machhendranath it is clear that one aspect of his/her worship is related to his/her association with the provision of rain. The festival starts in *Baisakh* (April) a few weeks prior to the normal onset of the monsoon rains. The procession follows a ceremonially prescribed route with well-defined halting places, receiving the constant homage of the Patan people. Finally the chariots are brought to a stop at Jawlakhel, west of the city, near Pulchowk. From the account of many foreign and local observers over the years, and my own experience, the fact that the divinity's role as a rain giver is most apparent at this stage and cannot be denied. Whatever the reason, the climatic events of the first onset of rains coincide with his *jatra* without fail. The day the *rath* reaches the Jawlakhel square we observe the climax of the festival culminated with royal presence and showing of *bhoto* that starts the rain.

There is a popular tale regarding the *bhoto*. **Karkotaka, the serpent king, who dwells in Tau Daha gave the jewel-studded bhoto to a Jyapu for having cured the ailing nagini’s eyes. The Jyapu, proud of possessing such a garment, even wore it into the paddy fields. One day, when he lay it by the course of his strenuous labours, the garment was stolen. Sometimes later, the Jyapu attending Machhendranath’s chariot festival spots the thief wearing his jewel studded bhoto. There is a struggle between the two but even Karkotaka in the guise of a man could not wrest the bhoto from the thief. Finally, the dispute was settled by donating the bhoto to Machhendranath. Since then it is displayed annually on the last day of his festival to reconfirm his continued possession.**

The Nepalese folk tales that purport the *bhoto* story suggest the incorporation of the display of *bhoto* into the Machhendranath festival as a happenstance; there is no mention of the rainmaking shirt in the legends of Machhendranath nor have I heard anyone mention the connection of the *bhoto* display and rain falling.
However as Slusser (1982: 375) mentions it, such a display of saintly relic for its wonder working powers is ethnographically quite common. Buddha’s own gown had been preserved in a vihara as per Legge (1965:39), and the pilgrim said: “it is a custom of the country when there is a great drought, for the people to collect in crowds, bring out the robe, pay worship to it, and make offerings, on which there is immediately a great rain from the sky”. The coincidence of the display of Karkotaka’s (naga raja) bhoto and rainfall is striking, as nagas are the agents of rain and Machhendranath has the power to induce the agents to shower rain. So the bhoto element as Slusser (1982:376) mentions can be an ancient and integral part of the festival in accord with all other rain-associated symbolism incorporated into the festival.

The Machhendranath rath jatra, one of the biggest jatras of Bungamati Newars as well as that of the Valley, is part of what Newars and non-Newars do every year in order to accomplish certain objectives. The jatra conveys the Newar beliefs that link the fate of the King and the country to the jatra, for it has the capacity to reveal what is previously unknown. The jatra is also instrumental in that it brings rain; it does not merely symbolize the coming of the monsoon, but it actually brings rain.

### 5.2 Bhairav Jatra

In Bungamati, this festival takes place on the last day of Mohini (Dashain) festival that falls around October-November. Bhairav jatra is a common festival of most Newar settlements although each locality, village, town or city has its own specific time during a calendar year for its celebration. The uniqueness of Bungamati's Bhairav jatra is the ritual of Hanuman Jaguane preceding the jatra in which Bhairav and Bhairvi (Aji and Aju to Bungamati Newars) are taken out for a procession in the dooly (palanquin) following the traditional ritual route in the village. This jatra starts with the ‘Hanuman Jagaune” ritual on dashami (10th and final day of Mohani festival) and continues to the next day (ekadashi). Hanuman (monkey god) is called upon to remove Bhimsen from the path of Bhairav. According to the residents in Bungamati this ritual is in connection with the myth of Bhairav and Bhimsen. They were friends but one day they got into an argument that led them to contest each other’s power. Bhimsen told Bhairav that he was going to lie on the entrance of the path through which Bhairav had to pass for his jatra.
and challenged Bhairav to remove him from the path for his jatra. Bhairav could not remove Bhimsen, nor could he walk over him, so the only solution he could see was to take the help of Hanuman who was strong enough to remove Bhimsen. Hanuman is believed to have pushed Bhimsen away from the path with his tail so that Bhairav could get along with his jatra.

In the past (I was not told how long ago), it is said that humans were sacrificed on the occasion of this jatra and the meat was distributed as prasad (food offered to the deity which is afterwards eaten by the devotee) to the people. One who got the smallest finger would be the next sacrifice in the coming dashami and he would without any force go to the sacrificial ground (believed to be the tantric force drawing him to the ground). Today, goats and buffaloes are common sacrifice. It is said that the suwas (Jyapu ritual assistants) who perform the sacrifice are in a trance during this period and whoever comes to the sacrificial altar are sacrificed. The night of animal sacrifice at Bhairav temple after the jatra ends and the musicians go around collecting alms from Newar households; they mostly visit the houses of priests, chiefs, and officials of the village. They have to be given dhan (unhusked rice), rice, money and are also offered food and drinks. After going to various houses in the villages they start playing their instruments again at around 10 or 11 p.m. This music is a warning to the people not to come out of their houses; the warning was issued because of the belief that if anyone encountered the suwas while suwas were washing their blood smeared white robes at the two ponds in the village, they would die. So the people in the village do not leave their houses once they hear this music. In Bungamati, the musicians playing kahan baja (long horned metal musical instruments)\(^\text{18}\) for different rituals like death, initiation and various festivals come from Jyapu, Kasai/Khadgi, Kusle and some from Mali jat. However, Sakyas and Vajracharyas cannot play Kahan baja because their custom and tradition forbids them to do so.

\(^{18}\) Long-horned metal instrument used for many ceremonies and rituals. The instrument comprises of 12 numbers but normally 2-6 numbers are used except in an abnormal circumstances, i.e. when there is no rainfall for a long after it is due or during the time of famine and so on. Some residents also say that there should be 12 musicians playing the 12 numbers but strangely whenever the musicians reaches the number 12, one of them dies and there has never been 12 players for a long time. Moreover few people in the village are interested in the art of playing the instrument because of the lack of economic benefit.
Plate 6. Newar musicians playing kahan baja at Machhendranath bahal.

5.3 Godhe Jatra (Ganesh jatra in Bungamati)

Ganesh jatra in Bungamati is celebrated on the day of Godhe jatra in Katmandu. The silver image is taken from Machhendranath bahal to Karya Binayak (Ganesh temple) in the village. Ganesh is an important deity of both the Buddhist and Hindu Newars and receives much importance in the Newar socio-religious life.

5.4 Janai Purne

This festival is celebrated with rituals and feasting. The Newars in Bungamati have chhwela bhu (lit. chhwela plate)\(^1\) i.e., a plate with baji, chhwela (roasted meat), and usually curry, served with beer (thon) or spirits (ayela), on the eve of Janai Purne, which is a must before any important ceremony. On the following day (Janai Purne), quati (gruel made from boiling nine varieties of dried beans after they have sprouted by soaking in water) is prepared and eaten. On this day, the high jats change their sacred thread and the others are given a thread for protection on their wrist by the family priest. Many make a pilgrimage to Gosaikunda (Siva tirtha) on the mountains for a holy bath into the pool, which is a renowned tirtha. Pilgrims returning from Gosaikunda tell of

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\(^1\)Important festivals like Mohini, Gathe Mangal, Janai Purne, or before important domestic rites like kaeta puja or bare chhuyigu begin with a chhwela bhu; Nepali (1965) states that “Chhoyala Bhu is a feast at the beginning of the Dewali worship in which Chhoyala is served.” He must have misunderstood the frequency of the chhwela bhu in the Newari calendar. Chhewla is not eaten on vrta days, nor for twelve days after death of a household member. It is not accepted from castes lower than one’s own.
seeing an image of Siva lying in the water, while others tell of seeing his long-handled vessel of holy water he often carries. Those unable to go to Gosaikunda, visit Kumbhesvara in Patan for holy bathing. The pokhari lies in the courtyard of the five-tier temple of Mahadev (another name of Siva), which houses two three-foot Siva lingams. The lingam sheathed by coiled snake in gold is taken to the sunken pond the night before Janai Purne. The pond is filled with young men, splashing water, drenching the lingam when it is deposited at the center of the pond. Men clad in loincloths submerge in the water praying before the sacred lingam. Women scoop the water from the pond and sprinkle over their head and boys splash about in the water, laughing and shouting, reaching out for coins thrown by the worshippers. Then after the bathing and sprinkling of water, people receive the wrist threads. A legend says that long ago, a pilgrim while bathing in Gosaikunda dropped his brass water pot and it sank out of sight. Sometime later, it appeared in Kumbhesvara pond in Patan. People believe the vessel made its way from the mountain lake through some subterranean river into Kumbhesvara Pond. The fact that the water of this pond remains abnormally cold throughout the year serves to make this story convincing.

5.5 Byancha Janake (feeding of the frogs)

This Janai Purne day is also a day for another ritual among the Newars. They call it Byancha Janake (feeding the frogs), and the farming Newar communities observe it. In Bungamati, most villagers observe this ritual as almost all households are involved in agriculture. The housewives get up early in the morning, purify the house and cook quati as well as rice for feeding the frog. The rice for frogs is cooked from the paddy separated for seeds. The food is put on leaves and left on the edges of rice field as well as all the temples and shrines in the village. Frogs are believed to bring rain by their croaking sound but according to Bungamati Newars, such reverence from the farming communities is not associated with the rain making aspect of the frog. It is in honour of the frog as it lured the demon (Ghanta Karna) into the swampy field saving the lives of the farmers.
5.6 Buddha Purnima

The full moon day of late April and of early May is consecrated by Buddha’s followers as “The Triple Blessing”, heralding the day Buddha was born, the day he later received enlightenment, and the day in which he passed away into Nirvana. This full moon day is celebrated at Swayambunath and Boudha with prayers; devotees fast, bring offerings of flowers, coins, fruits to the shrines, and parading groups march through the street of Katmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur with images of Buddha, prayer flags and banners. In Bungamati too, Buddha’s image is taken out in procession around the village, and the villagers visit Machhendranath temple and Swayambunath with offerings.

5.7 Gunla

The sacred month of Lord Buddha lasts for thirty days beginning around 12th August and ending around 10th September (fifteen days before full moon of August or early September, and the fifteen days which follow comprise the sacred lunar month of Gunla as holy for the Buddhist population like Ramadan for Muslims or four months of Chaturmas for Hindus). During these auspicious days Buddhists devote themselves with great enthusiasm to fasting, penances, pilgrimages and holy ceremonies with the typically Newari climax of feasting, merrymaking and rejoicing. In Kathmandu, the focal point for Gunla activities is Swaymbhunath stupa; in Bungamati, it is the Machhendranath temple. Each day during this gunla month, different Newari religious music guthis from all over the valley come to the temple in buses, cars and walk to the temple playing various ceremonial instruments, worshiping at the Machhendranath temple and Hayagriwa temple. On the final day, these guthis bring offerings to the deities culminating with the feasts among the guthiyars. On the final day of this gunla month Machendranath bahal is alive with music, great crowds of people carrying basketful offerings of food, fruits, flowers, and coins, offer the offerings to the deities at the temples of Machhendranath and Hayagriwa Bhairav.
5.8 Krishna Jatra

This jatra is not a big celebration in Bungamati like it is in Patan. Here the jatra is celebrated only in the Maharjan twa (Wards 5 and 6).

Indra jatra, which is celebrated with great pomp among the Newari community in Kathmandu, is not celebrated in Bungamati.

5.9 Nag Panchami

This day falls during monsoon season, i.e. late in July or early August. Every shop, temple, mansion and hut, honor the serpent deities by displaying pictures of nagas over the doorways and holding ceremonies of worship before them. Nagas are worshipped not only as controllers of rain but also as guardians to wealth and treasures. Putting pictures of naga on doorways is also believed to safeguard the house and its wealth and bring prosperity. In Bungamati, Sakyas and many Tuladhars do not put up the picture of naga like the Maharjans and Shresthas although they believe and honor the power of nagas and perform pujas throughout the year in places where nagas are said to dwell (near water spouts, pools springs and streams).

5.10 Gokarna Aunsi

This is the most auspicious day of honouring fathers. It falls on the last day of the dark fortnight in August or early September. Many go to Gokarna village, five miles east of Kathmandu where the most sacrosanct of all countless Siva Lingams in the valley is enshrined. The sanctity of this shrine is greatly enhanced by its location on the banks of the southward-coursing Bagmati River. On this day, people flock to this sacred shrine of Siva to honour the memory of their fathers and to promote the welfare of their souls. Ritual bathing takes place, where both men and women prostrate themselves in the shallow water, and rise to pray letting the liquid flow from between cupped palms. Eggs, fruits and sweets are especially auspicious to Siva. Pindas (small balls of rice or barley flour) are offered to the souls of the dead, either by immersing them in the river or giving them to a sacred cow. Those unable to travel to Gokarna take holy baths in nearby rivers or even in their homes although the amount of religious merit gained may not be the same.
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as that of going to Gokarna. On this day living fathers are honoured with gifts and food and he bestows blessings on the children.

5.11 Mata Tirtha Puja

This day is in honour of mothers and most Newars whose mothers are dead consider it their sacred duty to go to the Mata-Tirtha Kunda and offer worship and gifts in her memory. Those whose mothers are alive are presented with good food from their children. Married daughters make delicious food and take it to their mother and receive blessings from her. The Mata Tirtha Kunda is six miles southwest of central Kathmandu, just off the Thankot road. It has two pools (Kundas), a larger one for bathing and the smaller one up the hill, famous as a place where one sees one's dead mother's face mirrored in the pool’s water as one looks into it. On this day, people arrive early in the morning when still dark and bathe in the larger pool; after this pious act they climb up to the Mata Kunda, offer prayer of Siva on the way. On reaching the Kunda, they toss rice, sweetmeats, fruits, etc. and bow and pray in front of the water. They believe their gifts will reach the dead mother and will bring peace to her departed soul. The idea of seeing the dead mother’s face relate to an event which is said to have happened long ago when a girl jumped into the pool when seeing her mother’s face and disappeared. Those whose mothers are alive are presented with good food from their children. Married daughters make delicious food and take it to their mother and receive blessings from her.

5.12 Sithinakha

This is a day for cleaning wells followed by feasting in the month of Jestha (April/May). Most villages in Kathmandu celebrate this festival. There is a belief among the Newars that on this day, nagas leave the wells and therefore the cleaning can be done. People gather together and appoint some people to clean wells after which there is a feast. In Bungamati too, this festival is observed, but with modern water taps; more and more people are relying on tap water rather than well water and the cleaning part is losing its importance. People are also not easily available as volunteers for cleaning, so it is sometimes not cleaned at all. They just feast at home on this day without cleaning the
well. Talking to some people in Bungamati, I found that nowadays, if sufficient people are available for cleaning, they clean the well but feast in their respective homes; there are others who collect money to feast together.
Chapter 6

6 ROLE OF GUTHI IN THE VILLAGE SOCIETY

A very important institution in Newar communities is called guthi. There are different kinds of guthis for different purposes and membership in a community to a large extent, depends on membership in the important guthis. Guthi membership creates overlapping networks of social relations, which serve to tie differently positioned community members into the kind of integrated unity a Newar community is, despite the many connections to the outside world.

Guthi plays a vital role in the Newar social organization; every Newar town, city, and village, and every Newar jat, is found to have this institution which controls most of their social interactions, work etc. Among the non-Newars, guthis are mostly institutions dealing with financing of temples or other charitable institutions. For Newars, guthi membership is an important part of their social life. The membership may be inherited or in the case of females, acquired by marriage. In Bungamati, like in any other Newari locality, we find guthis, as being the most important for their socio-religious life; si (death) guthi for all the Newar groups and diwali or digu deya guthi for the worship of digu deya (clan deity).

Though the precise functions of si guthi (literally, “death association”) varies from jats to jats, and localities to localities, the most essential functions of such a guthi for all Newar groups, is to provide the ritual materials needed for the procession and cremation of the body; they also provide moral support and sometimes food to the bereaved family, participate in funeral processions, and in many cases, attend to the actual cremation once the pyre is lit.

6.1 Si Guthi

Si guthi is an important institution of social and moral control in the Newar social organization. Memberships in an appropriate si guthi is, in most cases, the primary basis for determining the legitimacy of an individual’s claimed jat status as also mentioned by Rosser (1978) and Quigley (1987); this guthi is the locus of authority concerning jat membership. In some cases guthiyars from the main si guthi may also split due to intra conflicts. In Bungamati, Tuladhars have three si guthis. I was surprised to find so many
guthis within the small community of Tuladhrs in the village. Some Tuladhar residents who had split from their original si guthi provided me with a number of reasons for the split. One group split because some members of the guthi had different ideology; they did not want serving of alcohol in the guthi feast so they split from the main guthi. The other split occurred because one of the guthi members brought in a Maharjan (Jyapu jat) friend as a member with the payment of Rs. 10,000/-. This was not acceptable to some other members of the original Tuladhar si guthi. So at present, there are three Tuladhar si guthis in the village.

Membership into the father’s si guthi does not require anything more than an eating bowl which is needed for the guthi feasts. Usually the oldest male of a household is the member of the si guthi and he alone attends to all the duties of the guthi. If the sons split from the joint household, each son with separate household need to be the member of the father’s guthi if living in the same locality. To enter as a new member who has no ancestral membership, the main criterion for the approval of membership is the jat status. Guthi members may consult with the applicant’s former si-guthi members in order to be certain of their status. Once accepted, the new member will usually be required to pay an entrance fee and hold a feast for the guthiyars (members of guthi), which could be quite expensive (around Rs.10,000/- according to the Maharjan man I was talking to) for those who cannot afford it. A Maharjan household in Bungamati told me that they were not members of the Maharjan si guthi because they could not afford the expense. The consequence was that they had a difficult time when a relative died for no one from the village came forward to help with the funeral. This Maharjan man’s family was from a different village. His aunt who married a Sakya in Bungamati had no children and adopted him so he grew up in Bungamati and married a woman from Kirtipur. Because his father’s household being was from a different place, he had no ancestral membership in the Maharjan si guthi in Bungamati and could not afford to enter the guthi as a new member. When the aunt died, there were no guthiyars to help with the cremation. She could not be a member of Sakya guthi (being of lower jat) and her husband’s household was not cooperative as they were of a higher jat and did not like the Sakya property passed on to the woman’s kin instead of going back to the Sakya family. No one came forward to help with the funeral. He had to go to his family in Kupondole, another
locality in Lalitpur, gather some help there, and finally cremate his aunt. His wife was complaining about the self-centeredness of Bungamati Newar society, saying that it would not have happened in Kirtipur (the fourth biggest Newar settlement in the valley) Newar society. I do not know much about Kirtipur, but I thought that what happened in their case was typical of Newar society. Many people talk about Kathmandu Valley being the worst place to die if one has no relations and no guthi; no one will come forward to help. The rigid Newar society based on purity and pollution leaves little room for help in situations of pollution like death. It is not entirely unthinkable when the society lays so much emphasis on pollution and jat rigidity in such situations. Death is a highly polluted condition and hence not easy for people to forget the jat barriers even though people in everyday life talk about equality and are critical of hierarchical social norms.

There is now a new si guthi called Parupakar in Bungamati. The various water acceptable jats can be a member of this guthi. It is not based on the traditional si guthi socio-religious norms of jat endogamy and other rituals but the water unacceptable jats (majyupim) cannot be members in this guthi.

Rosser (1978) has suggested that acceptance into a higher jat si guthi is the most critical phase of an individual’s upward jat mobility, and that paying an inflated entrance fee is typically involved in this process. Others like Quigley (1987) suggest that admission of an individual of unknown status into a si guthi is virtually impossible, and that the admittance of a jat inferior is even less likely. From my own observation and information that I gathered in Bungamati, I found a Maharjan (Jyapu jat) admitted to a Tuladhar (Uray jat and supposed to be higher in rank than Jyapu jat) si guthi by paying around Rs.10,000. Some members of the Tuladhar si guthi did not accept the inclusion of a Maharjan into their si guthi so they split from their original guthi and formed a separate si guthi. This case shows that there is a possibility of upward mobility in the jat rank by being a member of higher ranked si guthi but it is not accepted by the larger society, nor commonly practiced, at least not in Bungamati. Most Newars I spoke to, like to maintain the jat purity in their si guthi.

An equivalent of si guthi is another guthi called sana guthi. Sana guthi functions more as a mourning society; Generally sana guthis do not actually attend the cremation of the deceased like the si guthi but act as an emotional support group for the bereaved.
6.2 Digu Deya or Diwali Guthi

Digu deya or Diwali guthi is another important guthi in the social life to which every Newar must belong. It is an association of lineage members devoted to the common worship of their clan deity (digu deya) in Bungamati as well as in all the Newar communities in the valley. Marriage is possible among the members of si guthi but prohibited among members of digu deya guthi as the members of this guthi are the immediate agnatic kin (phuki members), observing 7 or 12 days of mourning period in the event of death of its members, and worship the same digu deya. Membership in a phuki, entails not only agnatic kinship but the annual reaffirmation of phuki membership through worshipping the same clan deity with fellow phukipim (phuki members) as members of one digu deya guthi. Though one may not shift from one digu deya guthi to another, nor belong to more than one at the same time, one may establish a separate guthi to honour the same clan deity (digu deya). This usually happens in response to intra lineage disputes or increase in phuki membership to an unmanageable size. These splits create baphuki, those with whom prior agnatic kinship is recognized, but who, in some cases, may be sufficiently distant to permit intermarriage between baphukipim (Nepali 1965). The new baphuki then becomes the basis for the formation of new digu deya guthi. Digu deya guthi members gather once or twice in a year for the worship of the clan deity and after the worship, members share a feast. Some Tuladhar households in Bungamati told me that they observe digu deya worship twice a year.

6.3 Temple And Other Guthis

Other guthis are various temple guthis. The temple attendants of Bhairav temple have the Dishi Pa guthi and belong to the Sakya thar. The Panejus of the Machhendranath temple are members of another guthi called Battish Paneju Samha under the Machhendranath temple guthi. Temple guthis own lands, which are hired out for cultivation to farmers, or members of the guthi. In case of Machhendranath guthi, Panejus are given land (for cultivation) as part of the payment for their work as temple attendants. Machhendranath
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guthi has the same land holding in Bungamati. According to the Panejus in Bungamati, the Machhendranath temple guthi and Pashupatinath (the main Siva temple in Kathmandu) guthi, have the biggest landholdings in the whole valley. Other guthis in Bungamati are, Salu guthi, which is in charge of maintaining clean paths leading to the Machhendranath temple square, as well as cleaning the temple compound. There are also various guthis for music in the Village, like Bhajan guthi for those who play Harmonium and Tabla in connection with Bhajans (religious hymns) in festivals and worship. There are also guthis for players of other Newar instruments like kahan baja (the long horned metal instrument) essential in all festivals and ceremonies.

6.4 Socio-Economic Aspects of Guthi Organization

Talking to various people in the village on the subject of guthi, I found that guthis are like men’s club; digu deya guthi is different in this respect because it deals with the family worship of their ancestral god and every member of the household is present for worship and feast. The activities in the other guthis basically involve men.

Annually, the si guthis of the three dominant jats have two feasts in a year, one in Shree Panchami (around March) and the other in Poush (December-January). The Brahmacharya Sakyas, however, have more guthi feasts. The Shree Panchami feast lasts for a day while the Poush feast according to both Tuladhar and Maharjan last for 3 days. It is feasting and talking, making suggestions, arguing, and feasting may even end in physical fights when members get drunk. Decisions in guthi matters are made by the thakali (head of the guthi who is senior most in age) and his next senior colleague. Certain details and decisions are not made known even to the rest of the members of the guthi. Si guthi is a male domain; women and family do not take part in the guthi feasts unlike the digu deya guthi or temple pujari guthi. The cooking of food, guarding the guthi house during nights of feasting, and responsibility of buying and getting the feast ready, is divided among the guthiyars. If there are sufficient members (approximately thirty or more), six men are allotted for each feast day-- two for cooking, two as night vigilantes, and two for shopping. They may need the help of their women folk for serving

20 Disputes may concern the eligibility of a member’s new wife or her children by former marriage for guthi membership.
the food to the guthiyars (guthi members). The above responsibilities are taken in turns by the guthiyars. While eating, the bhoye (feast) guthiyars sit in order of seniority. The senior most member known as thakali takes his seat first, and those next to him have to bow and touch his feet before taking his seat. The junior most has to bow to all the senior members before taking his seat. Food is also distributed in the same order. Women are not allowed to be present when men are eating, or discussing. In Shree Panchami feast, decisions about matters regarding guthi work (e.g. how much wood is needed for the year’s cremation, whether they should buy chopped wood or they should buy trees, the accounts and other matters) are taken up during this guthi feast. Previously Shree Panchami feast lasted for seven days. Men stayed away from home, with guthi members (guthiyars), eating and drinking, fighting, arguing, and generally having a good time. There is even a saying that men did not get out until their special scarves were covered with lice. Then they got out, had a wash and took up family life again. But today, everyone is feeling the economic pressure. According to a member of Tuladharg si guthi, the feast in Poush (December-January) lasting for three days cost Rs.300/-. It is no longer possible to have more days of feasting because, besides the money needed for the feast, they will be unable to earn anything during this period. More and more people have to rely on outside income to maintain a household, and one can no longer afford to be occupied with long days of feasting. Normally, a buffalo is slaughtered for the feast. According to the guthiyars, the feast has a special meat item, which is a must. It is a lump of buffalo meat weighing 1/2 kg and another lump weighing half of that. They are known as Takula and Chikula respectively. The meat lumps are made according to the number of guthi members. In all the guthis, worship is offered to various deities before the feast commences. Among the Tuladhars, the cooked rice and all the other items are first taken to the Bhairav temple for blessing and also offered to the Sakya temple attendants (Dishi Pa guthiyars) before the members commence feasting. The kind of worship and guthi internal affairs is kept secret. The thakali and the Naike (the assistant thakali, next in seniority) are the only members of the guthi who know the internal guthi matters and decisions taken on various guthi matters. Even the guthi members have to leave the room when thakali and Naike are making decisions or talking about internal affairs. Most guthis have some land, but in general temple guthis have more land than si guthi. In the si
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guthi, usually the wealthy members may donate land. Some guthis are able to retain the
land and build a place for guthi gatherings and feast while some guthis have members
who may use the land for personal use. Since thakali is the only person who makes the
decision and knows about guthi property, it is difficult for other members to take actions
if guthi land is thus used as personal property by some members; such cases have
happened in Bungamati. Most si guthis do not have much landholding or funds.
Sometimes when guthis are as big as Maharjan si guthi (about 200 members), funds can
be accumulated through fines, and land offerings by the richer members. Maharjan si
guthi even gave loans to guthiyars of up to Rs.100,000 payable in a year’s time. They do
not do so now due to problems with funding.
Brahmacharya Sakya have a separate guthi as they follow slightly different rituals and
tradition from the other Sakyas.

Table 2: The guthi land holding in Bungamati (Source for the table: Village
Development office, Bungamati).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GUTHI</th>
<th>ROPANI (Land measurement: 1 ropani = approx. 500 sq m)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bhairav Guthi</td>
<td>1,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paneju khandi</td>
<td>365</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wasi</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kurle</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damara</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Praja</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Most of the temple guthis own land. The income from these lands is used for worship and
payment of the temple workers, e.g. the panejus (Machhendranath temple attendants or
priests) will be given certain amount of agricultural land for cultivation as his payment.
His family can go on using the land for agriculture even if the paneju dies but they have
to pay kut to the temple guthi. In some cases people have claimed such land for
themselves and somehow managed to have the land registered in the Malpot (Land
Revenue) office in their name as personal property. I shall narrate the case of one such
guthi land, which has become personal property. Machhendranath guthi’s land is divided
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for the various temple workers like paneju, the kurle, the wasi, and the suwas. The suwas have many duties in connection to Machhendranath temple and its rituals as well as many of the Bungamati jatras and rituals. For payment of their work throughout the year, there was about 12 ropani of land allotted from the Machhendranath guthi land holdings. The previous suwas seem to have managed to get the land as personal property, which is why the present suwas do not have access to guthi land as payment for their duties. There are only about three suwas in Bungamati for no one wants to take up the duties involved in it as there is no significant income for their work according to one of the suwas. He says that he is doing his service just to keep up the old family tradition, but he is not sure whether his sons will do so.
Chapter 7

7 BUNGAMATI CASTES

The use of the term “jat” or “jat” in Nepalese society can refer both to the various ethnic groups (e.g. Gurung, Magar, Newar, Chhetri, Tamang), or to ethnic sub-group like Thapa, Shrestha, and Khatry. In addition, the term “jat” also refers to more than one ethnic group like Matwali jat (referring to the alcohol drinking group like Limbu, Rai, Gurungs, etc.), and to a gender stri jat (female gender) etc. The term “thar” applies to one’s surnames like Tuladhar, Shrestha, Khatry, Thapa, and can also mean jat. Gellner (1992: 64-65) links thar to the jat system, and says that thar names identify what he calls jat subgroups, which have a social and religious identity within the rank system, but are not themselves exogamous like kin groups or endogamous like more inclusive jat units.

Thar names locate people in the jat system. According to Levi (1990: 138), members of a thar may see themselves as sharing an ancestor in some cases, but in other thar, thar membership and shared surname has to do with a common historical origin in an occupation or group. Robert Levy (1992) has used this term to refer to various Newar groups and has also mentioned that among the Chhetri, all thars are equal in rank, e.g. Khatry and Bhandari are two Chhetri thars and both have equal ranks in the ritual hierarchy. In Newars, however, thars are unequal in rank and not merely surnames. In the daily social interaction, Nepalese use thar and jat interchangeably, according to situations. When referring to someone as a third person, jat is most invariably used, e.g. What jat is he or she? When the conversation is in the first person, the question will almost always be-- what is your thar? Thar in this context can be seen as the polite form of jat. So thar and jat can both refer to ranked groups or surnames. I will refer to the various Newar groups as thar as this will indicate both their surname and their ritual rank in the Newar jat hierarchy. These thars may again fall under a larger group, which I shall refer to as jat, like Jyapu, or Bare. They are the broader group under which the surnames fall and are sometimes used by non-Newars to refer to them. It is very common in the valley to refer to Newars as “Jyapu” by non-Newars, whatever their surnames be, and it is common to hear Newars referring to the Matwalis as ‘Bhote”’(mountain tribe). The terms “Jyapu” and “Bhote” in such reference is meant to be somewhat derogative.
A special feature of Newari settlement in Bungamati is its wide range of Newar *jats* in the small settlement of six wards. Most of the Newar villages in Lalitpur are dominated by one major *jat*; for e.g. Khokana, Bungamati’s neighbouring village, is a Jyapu village of Maharjan sub-group and has its own traditions and festivals. The following table will give the approximate household numbers of various Newar *thars* in the village of Bungamati.

**Table 3. Number of Households of Various Newar *Thars* in Bungamati (Source: Village Development Committee.)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thar/Jat (Surname/Caste)</th>
<th>Number of Households</th>
<th>Caste Level</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VAJRACHARYA</td>
<td>10-15</td>
<td>Bare- High caste household priests (Buddhist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHAKYA</td>
<td>150-200</td>
<td>Bare- High caste temple priests/ craftsmen (Buddhist)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TULADHAR</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>Uray- high caste merchant; Buddhist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAHARJAN</td>
<td>200-300</td>
<td>Jyapu (farmer) upper lower caste Buddhist/Hindu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SHRESTHA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>High caste merchant (Hindu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MALI</td>
<td>50-60</td>
<td>Gardener- Lower caste, water acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DESHAR</td>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Lower caste, water acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAU</td>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>Barber-lower caste, water acceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KUSLE/KAPALI</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Jogi- low caste, water unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KHADGII/NAYEE</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Butcher- low caste, water unacceptable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PORE</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Sweepers- low caste, Untouchable, water unacceptable</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution table shows that the village is dominated by three major *thars*, namely, Sakya, Maharjan, and Tuladhar. According to the villagers, Maharjans, Sakyas and Shresthas from the cities of Lalitpur, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur settled in the village after Machhendranath was brought to the valley. To this day, we find most of these groups actively involved in the Machhendranath annual festival as well as being part of the daily caretakers with designated responsibilities. According to popular belief, most
Tuladhars in the village are offsprings of intermarriage between the Shresthas and Maharjans, or Sakyas and Maharjans. My main focus will be on the three thars (Sakyas, Tuladhars and Maharjans), as they constitute the dominant groups among the Newars of Bungamati. Except for the Shresthas, most minor groups belong to the lower jats in the Newar jat hierarchy although each has a significant role in the overall context of village life.

7.1 The Dominant Castes (Sakya, Tuladhar, Maharjan)

In Bungamati, we find that the majority of households belong to the Maharjans, Sakyas and Tuladhars. Sakyas are followers of Buddha (Buddha Margi); Tuladhars and Maharjans are Buddha Margi as they use Gubaju/Guruju (Vajracharya household priest) for domestic rituals. However, some Tuladhars, like the descendants of a mixed marriage between Shrestha male and Tuladhar or Maharjan female, observe some Hindu festivals not observed by Tuladhars having Sakya or Vajracharya ancestry in Bungamati. The Kathmandu Tuladhars however do not regard themselves descendants of such mixed marriage. They come from two main merchant families- Tuladhars and Baniya; in some cases, Tuladhar merchants having sired children from Tibetan women, bring them to Kathmandu and assimilate them into their society. Kathmandu Tuladhars take great pride in being Buddha Margi and are devoted to Newar Buddhism, which is manifested in their traditions and rituals.

7.2 Sakyas

Sakyas (belonging to Bare jat) are the prominent Buddha Margi group in the village. In Bungamati they are the second largest group in the number of households next to the Maharjans. They, like the Vajracharya, fall on the highest level of Newar jat hierarchy as Gellner (1995), and Nepali (1965) have also stated. Newar Siva Margi priests (Rajopadhyas) also fall on this level although they are very small in number compared to the Sakyas and Vajracharyas. There are internal conflicts between Sakyas and Vajracharya groups about superiority. Both Sakyas and Vajracharyas are thars belonging to Bare jat, which is the jat of hereditary priests. Among the Bare jat, the Vajracharya thar alone may perform homa (fire sacrifice); most major rites of passage (sanskara)
require *homa*, the most important of sacrifices. The Vajracharya’s exclusive right to perform *homa* directly leads to his monopoly of domestic priesthood; and the necessity of all to undergo rites of passage assures the Vajracharya of *jajman* (employers of priest, sacrificer) thus placing the Vajracharya in a position parallel with the Hindu Brahman. Sakyas on the other hand can only be temple priests and cannot perform domestic rites. It must be this difference between the two groups, which brings conflict to their level of rank in the hierarchy. Vajracharyas feel they are higher than the Sakyas because of their position as domestic priests; other Newars outside these two *thars* regard them as more or less equal. They marry into each other’s *thar*, although marriage between a Vajracharya male and Sakya female is more common than between a Vajracharya female and a Sakya male. If possible, Vajracharyas prefer not to marry Sakyas.

Among the three major households in Bungamati, Sakyas are more educated and economically better off. Many of the well-educated professionals have left the village and live in Patan or other city areas though they come to the village for most of the domestic rituals as is customary in the Newar society. Sakyas claim to be the descendents of Swayambhunath and are settled in and around Machhendranath *bahal* (temple compound). They are supposed to be one of the hundred settlers arriving in the village as caretaker of Machhendranath, when the deity was brought to the valley and Bungamati became one of the homes of the deity. In Bungamati, many Sakya households have members as priests or caretakers (*Panejus*) of the Machhendranath temple. This role puts them in a position of differential treatment (besides being given material benefits) from the rest of the members in the society, especially in Bungamati. Thus they are in a sense raised to the level of the deity. Being a *Paneju* provides them with Machhendranath temple *guthi* land to cultivate as payment for their services as priests. When a *Paneju* dies and new ones replace them, the dead *Paneju*’s family can continue cultivating the land but they have to pay *kut* (rent) to the new *Paneju*, according to the agreement between the two.

Sakyas undergo ten-fold initiation rituals from birth to death like other ritually pure *jat* Newars. The initiation ritual *Bare Chhuyigu* meaning making of *Bare* for the male Sakya is similar to that of Vajracharya. Failing to undergo *Bare Chhuyigu* entails loss of right to act as priests and loss of the *jat* rank of *Bare*. However, only those *Bare* whose fathers
are Vajracharya are permitted to undergo a second consecration, that of tantric initiation “acharya abhisheka” (acha luyega which means “consecration of a priest” in Newari). Those undergoing the second consecration and purification are empowered to function as purohita (household priest). So Sakyas can be temple priests but not purohita. This initiation ritual of becoming a Bare is performed at the early ages of 5 to 9 for both Sakyas and Vajracharyas. In Bungamati, the ceremony takes place in the Machhendranath bahal (the temple compound), in other Newar villages and cities it is performed in vihara or Bahal (center of Buddhist Newar religious life). In Bungamati, Panejus Machhendranath temple priests and Gubaju (Vajracharya domestic priest) are required for this elaborate ritual, which is performed in a group as it is too expensive to perform individually. Eligibility for being a Paneju is denied without this formal ritual in the presence of Panejus and performed by Gubaju and his assistant. Those Sakyas who have moved away from Bungamati also need to come to Bungamati for performing this ritual as their ancestry is from Bungamati. The musicians with kahan baja (about 6 or 7 long horned metal instruments) are present to play the music at certain points of the ritual. Suwas (Jyapu ritual assistant) are present to carry the umbrella over the heads of the initiates. Nau (Barber) is needed to cut the hair and paint the feet of the initiates, red. Paju (mother’s brother) performs the initial symbolic cutting of the hair, which is completed by Nau or barber. Nini (father’s sister) takes the hair in a broad brass or copper tray and later throws it into the river. She is given money and cloth as a token for her work. The little boys then become vikshu (monks) for four days begging alms mostly from the homes of relatives. When the fourth day is completed, there is a feast where family, friends and everyone involved in the rituals are invited. Some families spend a large amount of money for such a feast ranging from Rs. 10,000/- to Rs. 50,000/- or more. Some do not invite friends but just the closest relatives participating in the ritual.
Plate 7. *Panejus performing the Bare Chhuyigu rites to the Sakya boy in Machhendranath bahal*

The rites of *barha* (keeping the girl child in a dark room out of sight from sunlight and the male members of the society for 12 days) and *ihi* (mock-marriage of the girls to Surya Narayan “Sun God”) for girls are performed before the girls start menstruating. So these rites for girls also take place when they are between 5 to 9 years of age and performed in groups to reduce the expense. The Vajracharya domestic priest, *Gubaju*, presides over the rituals. These rites also include feasting where friends and relatives; the size of *bhoye* (feast) depends on the individual’s capacity for such an expense.

Sakyas have three *si guthis* (funeral associations) in Bungamati, and the first death purification is performed on the seventh day after death.

There is another group of Sakyas in Bungamati who are not eligible for the post of *Paneju*; they are known as Brahmacharya Sakyas. These Sakyas are the descendants of the Sakya monks who changed into householders’ life. They got married and had families but retained their Brahmacharya name. Some Sakyas made a joke about how the natural need for woman made the Brahmacharya Sakya abandon his *brahmachari* (celibate) state and become a householder. While talking to what I might call the original householder Sakyas, I got an impression that the Brahmacharya Sakya had somehow fallen from
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grace. It was not so much what they said, but the meanings they conveyed in between lines or jokes on their celibate life. I could be wrong, but it could be that others expected them to be monks and had put more faith in them. These Sakyas have their own si guthi (funeral association) consisting of about 35 households. They have slightly different guthi rituals than the rest of the Newari si guthi; the Brahmacharya Sakyas informed me that they have 35 feasts in a year. This guthi ritual and worship connected with it takes priority over all other rituals even to the extent of not observing the behavioral restriction which in Nepal is generally associated with the death pollution and strictly observed. According to them, a household gets purified on the same day of death if the death occurs on the day of guthi’s special ritual. The household gets purified the same day the dead body is cremated so the household member can attend to guthi ritual and feat. This will be unthinkable to non-Newar Nepalese or other Newars especially the Siva Margi. Among Sakyas, death pollution lasts for seven days after which the household is purified. Other death rituals are spread over the first year of death like most other Newar and non-Newar groups.  

Most Sakyas in Bungamati have been landowners but their holdings are diminishing due to demographic growth and consequent division of land. Today, a number of them in the village cultivate their own agricultural field, while a good number of them are employed in government and private services and also run their own woodcraft business. Some wealthier ones have moved to the cities although they have their ancestral home and some landholdings in Bungamati.

7.3 Tuladhars

Tuladhars (Scale Holder) belonging to the Uray jat, are Buddha Margi. They are the high-jat Buddha Margi merchants found mostly in Kathmandu and rank just below Bare jat (Vajracharyas and Sakyas). Traditionally Tuladhars abstain from eating pork, beef, chicken egg and meat just like the Sakyas and Vajracharyas; therefore, chicken and pigs are not seen in the Sakya and Tuladhar twas in Bungamati; most of the households rear only ducks and goats. The thars (surnames) of Uray jat, suggest origins as artisans and mercantile specialists like Sikarmi (carpenters), Kamsakar (metal-workers). However
Tuladhar and Baniya thars do not suggest of such origin; their thars indicate trading occupation. All the eight or nine sub-groups (thars) within the Uray jat form a single marriage circle although there is a sense of internal stratification among Uray as is very common in most Newar jats and thars. Today, many Uray sub-groups (thars) are abandoning their old designations and giving “Tuladhar” as their family surname (thar) as it is most highly regarded in Kathmandu. According to some Tuladhars, Kathmandu Tuladhars can trace their ancestry to two core groups. One group with trading ties to Tibet and another group known by the name “Baniya”. Some Tuladhars are believed to be descendants of children of mixed marriages between Sakya men and Jyapu, or lower jat women of water acceptable jats like some Tuladhars in Bungamati; in some cases Sakyas and Vajracharyas having lost their jat rank because of failing to undergo Bare Chhuyigu (initiation rite to become Bare) became Tuladhars.

In Bungamati, I found that some Tuladhars had Sakya, while some others have Shrestha ancestry. Those with Sakya ancestry are Buddha Margi in their socio-religious practices while those with Shrestha ancestry are more Hindu in their socio-religious practices. This was very noticeable to me on a Nag Panchami day; this is the day Hindus worship naga (serpent) and put up the pictures of naga on their entrance door. I saw some Tuladhars putting up the naga pictures but not among those Tuladhars with Sakya ancestry.

Kathmandu Tuladhars may not accept Bungamati Tuladhars to be of equal rank to them as they think that Bungamati Tuladhars’ origin is questionable. In Kathmandu, there is no question that Tuladhars occupy a higher rank than the farmer jat Jyapu although in the Nepal jat hierarchy of the 1854 Law Code (Muluki Ain) they fall in the level II non-enslavable alcohol drinkers where all the Buddha Margi Newars like Sakya, Vajracharya are placed as well as Maharjans (Jyapu). The Newar community however, has its own levels of jat hierarchy which anthropologists like G. S.Nepali, Robert I.Levy, and David Gellner have given detailed accounts of. Maharjans are ranked at level III, below the Hindu Margi Shrestha, and Buddha Margi Tuladhars in the Kathmandu city. In Bungamati many Tuladhar families have origins traced to mixed marriages between Shrestha or Sakya men, and Jyapu women.

Tuladhars and Maharjans have been linked in landlord-tenant relationship just like any other landowning high ranked groups like Sakyas or Shresthas. However, the picture is
changing in Kathmandu city as well as many other parts of the valley, as Maharjans are coming up economically and also acquiring land after the introduction of the *Mohi Hak* Legal Regulation (right of the tenants to the land they cultivate).

In Bungamati, I found the two thars (Tuladhars and Maharjans) to be more on the same level of rank in everyday social context. Intermarriages between the two are more acceptable which seem to speak of equality. The clearest evidence of emerging equality I came across was the fact that few Tuladhar households who were members of the Maharjan *si guthi* (death association), an association generally considered to be rigidly *jat* based. There could be other reasons for being in the Maharjan death *guthi* for these particular Tuladhar families. Their ancestors were actually the first Tuladhars in Bungamati and they are said to have been of mixed Shrestha and Maharjan/Tuladhar descent. Since a *si guthi* cannot run with just one or two households, they must have joined the Maharjan *si guthi* as they would not be accepted in Shrestha or other high *jat* death *guthi*. This indicates that Tuladhars in Bungamati may be on the same level with Maharjan (Jyapu) in the *jat* hierarchy. In contrast, it would be unthinkable I guess, for the Kathmandu Tuladhars to consider themselves on level with Jyapu.

Tuladhars also have similar life-cycle rituals as other Newars. Birth rituals are important and should be attended by the close *phuki* (agnatic kin) members who are again important for the death rituals and the many other rituals like the initiation rituals-*kaeta puja* (initiation rites) for boys and *barha* and *ihi* rites for girls. Tuladhars do not have the elaborate initiation rituals like the Sakyas and Vajracharyas in Bungamati; Gubaju and his assistant perform the rituals. The boy taking the initiation will be dressed as a *vikshu* for a day and the ritual is over; the age for performing this ritual is between 5-9 years.

There is a feast once the ritual is over, and how elaborate the feast is, depends on the individual household. *Ihi* and *barha* is the same among all Newar groups who need to undergo such rites and are followed by feasts. The age group for these rituals is also between 5 to 9 years of age. Tuladhars in Bungamati observe 10 days of death pollution like the Maharjans for the immediate households and close *phuki* members. The households also observe 45 days and one-year rites when the household where death has occurred is completely free of pollution.
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Walking through the village, I find that the wards (twas) inhabited by a mixture of Tuladhars and Sakyas seem to be in better condition than the wards inhabited by a majority of Maharjans. While discussing this aspect of the village with the Tuladhars and Maharjans, I found my view justified. Maharjans have a lower percentage of educated members, less open to changes, and more traditional. Some villagers told me that fifteen to twenty years back, none from the Maharjan twa could read and write. In order to understand written documents like letters, Maharjans would go to the Tuladhar/Sakya twas (wards 1-3) to have them read to them. Although Maharjans are higher in number in the village, a greater number of Tuladhar youths (male/female) are employed in the Tibetan carpet factory and other work places, in business fields as well as being involved in all kinds of religious work (Hindu/Buddhist). Tuladhars as well as higher jat Newars seem to be more open to new changes in lifestyle and customs, and to new ventures, compared to the Jyapus who are more traditional. Some anthropologists have also mentioned that Jyapus (Maharjans) are regarded as the authentic Newars by other Newars too. They still practice many of the old Newar customs, which the higher jat Newars may have given up.

In Bungamati, there is one Ganesh temple (Karya BiNayeak) where the priest is a Tuladhar, and so are the helping assistants. There is also a Buddha vihar taken care of by Tuladhars and Sakyas. This must be because of Maharjans position as farmers, and Tuladhars and Sakyas as merchants/craftsmen, and land owners. In Bungamati, most people think that Tuladhars are shrewd, hence more prosperous and innovative. A large number of Tuladhars are members of the VDC (Village Development Committee) and other associations in the village like the irrigation association, as well running cooperative and private schools. I found them quite interested and open to strangers; they were less shy in discussing their customs and traditions, and this goes for even those who have very little formal education.

7.4 Maharjans (Jyapu)

In the Lalitpur district, a majority of the Jyapu jat (farmers), go by the surname (thar) of Maharjan although there are other thars like Dangol. Suwal thar is mostly found in Bhaktapur Jyapu. I'll be referring to Bungamati Jyapu as Maharjans as they are referred
to as such in the village. According to a legendary tale of the village, Jyapus from Patan came to Bungamati after Machhendranath/Bungadeyo. Jyapus from Patan were one of the team members who went to Assam (India) to bring Machhendranath to the valley. They play important roles in the Machhendranath annual festivals and rituals connected with the temple throughout the year. There is also a guthi with Maharjan members, which is responsible for the cleaning of the temple paths and temple area once a month. They also serve important gods in various ways- in Bungamati, Jyapus known as suwa (Jyapu ritual assistant) cook rice for the feast in the Machhendranath jatra (festival). They are needed for holding the umbrella over the deity and the priests in the festival procession. They also perform sacrifices of goats, lambs, and ducks at the Bhairav temple during the Mohini (Dashain) festival and in other rituals that need animal sacrifice. However, they do not perform buffalo sacrifice because this is done by Khadgi (butcher) jat. Maharjans’ functions are also that of carrying the worship materials of gods and goddesses, and taking out spirit-offerings besides agriculture. The high jats often view Maharjans as both servants and farmers; both Newars and non-Newars share this view.

In Bungamati, suwas are also required in the initiation ritual of the Sakya and Vajracharya males for holding umbrellas over the heads of the initiates. Maharjan females provide mid-wife services to all the thars higher than them.

In Bungamati, the Maharjan settlement is concentrated on wards 5 and 6. Some households are also found in ward no.4 and few may be found in other wards as well. The typical Maharjan settlement as well as its courtyards is in the shape of an elongated rectangle, called nani with the temple of Ganesh. We can see this typical form in Bungamati as well. In the Maharjan twa, there is a small temple of Ganesh at one end of the rows of houses. On the opposite side is a shelter (phalca) where hymns (bhajan) are sung. During Krishna Astami, all the children gather at this place to sing and dance and celebrate the festival. The open space in front of the houses is used for numerous domestic and agricultural purposes, such as washing clothes and drying grain.

Maharjans living in the cities and villages do not differ much in agricultural practices. The difference is more social and cultural. The city Maharjans, consider themselves to be superior to the Maharjans in the villages, and intermarriage between them is rare. In Bungamati, Maharjans marry either within the village or the surrounding villages, like
Khokana, and Sunakothi (they are Maharjan villages in Lalitpur). Bhaktapur Maharjans consider themselves superior to Kathmandu and Lalitpur Maharjans because they are Hindus.

In the past, the duties of Maharjans as tenant farmers were extensive. They cultivated on rented land. There were two systems of payment -- adhiya (when the tenant pays the landlord half of the agricultural product), and kut (when the tenant pays a fixed amount, e.g. 2 muri\(^{21}\) of husked rice per ropani\(^{22}\)). The Newar landlords gave land in kut to Maharjans and received ritual services as well, while the Parbatiya landlords did not require such services. In addition to the rice mentioned above, 4 pathis of wheat every year and large quantities of rice straw which the landlord’s womenfolk used for cooking food had to be supplied. The landlord-tenant relationship was very close in many other ways, like the services provided to the landlords as messengers on ritual ceremonies, which were many in one calendar year. For the services rendered, the landlord extended help in times of economic and political difficulty to some extent; wearing the hand down (discarded) clothes of the rich landlords by the tenants was common. The tenants were also invited to the feasts as was expected of the landlords.

Today, there have been many changes in the landlord-tenant relationship. The Maharjans are no longer the subservient tenants. The reform in the land tenureship has changed much of the tenant's position in the relationship. Young Maharjans tend to see the old kind of landlord-tenant relationship as highly exploitative, and the only kind of relationship they want is economic and contractual. In the past, the insecurity of the tenant's holdings made them more susceptible to the exploitation. Since the tenants were unsure if the landlord would give the land for cultivation each year, it was beneficial for them to convert the unstable connection into a more permanent jajmani relationship with moral responsibilities on both sides (Gellner and Pradhan: 1995).

Landlords today are not allowed to enjoy the fruits of someone’s labour without a struggle. Maharjans are fully aware of their rights as cultivators and thus legal disputes between the landlord and tenant is common these days. Landlords cannot sell the land without granting the tenant his one-third share of the cultivated land. This has changed

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\(^{21}\) 20 pathi=1 muri; 1 muri=80-85 kg (approx). Usually used for measuring grains although this measurement is not commonly used now.
the usual system of cultivation; presently landowners cultivate the land themselves and use hired day-labours. This is a common practice in Bungamati. Those owning lands (even the high *jats*) cultivate the land themselves with hired day labourers. I was told by some of the VDC officials that about 25% of the landholders in the village acquired land through the new Land reform legislation ‘*Mohi Hak*’ (the right of the tenant). Today, most Maharjans in the village are landowners.

There is one *si guthi* for the entire Maharjan households in the village in Bungamati. There are some Maharjans who are not members of this death *guthi* as they may have settled in the area later and had no ancestral membership. Maharjans are very proud of their tradition and are strongly attached to traditional ways compared to many other Newar *thar*. Some villagers were talking about how rigidly they are attached to the old ways and refuse to make changes in their way of living, especially the older generation. Many high *jat* Newars have cut back on the number of feasts in a calendar year and are more concerned in using money for educating the children. For Maharjans however, feasts for relatives and festivals have multiplied with the new-found wealth and freedom. Some Maharjans in Bungamati spend more than Rs.100, 000/- for the *ihi* or *kaeta puja* feasts.

The changes due to Land Reform Legislation have lifted the socio-economic position of the Maharjans, not only in the cities but also in the villages like Bungamati. We find some educated Maharjans in the village and a number of them at least completing primary education and aspiring for better education for their children. They also own lands and cultivate for self-consumption as well as for sale if the landholding is large. Above all, different types of work are available in Kathmandu valley where they work as artisans, bricklayers, day-labourers, cooks, and gardeners besides agriculture. Some Maharjans have also learned woodcraft from the Sakyas and Tuladhars in the village and have opened two or three woodcarving shops. They are also active in the political arena. Maharjans have supported political leaders who use a Marxist vocabulary denouncing inequality, landlordism and the rich, and espousing the cause of the working class and peasantry. Such support for Communist candidates became obvious in the elections of 1991. Lalitpur district where the Maharjan population is quite large has been the

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22 1ropani = 500 sq. m. (approx); 1 pathi = 8 mana; 1 mana=1/2 kg (approx).
Communist stronghold after the 1991 change in the political system. The village adakchya (chief) elected in the last election in Bungamati is a Maharjan. Maharjans also have similar lifecycle rituals like the rest of Newar jats. The first death purification is observed on the 10th day of death like the Tuladhars and Shresthas in Bungamati. The usual 45th day ritual and the final purification in a year’s time by the immediate family members follows. The initiation ritual kaeta puja for the boys is not as elaborate as that of Sakya and is completed in one day. They can perform it at home and do not even require a Gubaju. Some who are well off sacrifice a goat in the Ganesh shrine near their twa (ward) and have a feast. Some spend lot of money on the feasts while others do a simple affair with close kins. The rituals of ihi and barha for girls are similar for Maharjans and other Newar jats.

7.5 Caste And Religious Services

Among the dominant jats Sakyas are followers of Buddha (Buddha Margi). Tuladhars and Maharjans are also Buddha Margi since they use Gubaju/Guruju (Vajracharya priest) for domestic rituals. However, some Tuladhars, depending on the ancestry, e.g. descendents of mixed marriage between Shrestha man and a Tuladhar or Maharjan woman, also observe some Hindu festivals not observed by Tuladhars having Sakya or Vajracharya ancestry in Bungamati. This is not common in Kathmandu Tuladhars who are basically Buddha Margi and are not the product of a mixed marriage between the high thar and the farmer jat (Jyapu). Lalitpur Jyapus are supposed to be Buddha Margi because they use gubaju/guruju (Vajracharya priest) as their household priest but in their socio-religious practice, they seem to be Hindus as well.

The Vajracharyas and Sakyas in Bungamati are mostly Machhendranath temple prieststors attendants called “Panejus”. Vajracharyas provide the services of Gubaju/Guruju (family priests for household and lifecycle rituals) to the people in Bungamati. Shresthas may use a Siva Margi priest “Rajopadhya” who may come from outside the village if one is not available, as the Siva Margi priests are very few in number in the Valley. Vajracharyas also provide the services of Baidya, (medicine man) providing medicine and cure through tantric and herbal treatment. They are also consulted for warding off evil spirits, fortune
telling, consulted on the compatibility and auspiciousness of the couple to be joined in the holy matrimony of marriage. Sakyas may act as priests at the temple of Machhendranath or Bhairav temple but they cannot be tantric priests like Vajracharyas since they cannot take the second initiation rite (acha lugeku). They are also craftsmen (goldsmith) by occupation, but in Bungamati I did not see any goldsmiths; I found them mostly engaged in woodcraft business, employed in offices, or working as teachers. Shresthas and Tuladhars are generally associated with shop keeping as their jat occupation though the majority of Tuladhars in Bungamati are involved in woodcraft business.

As Bungamati is predominantly a Buddhist village, we find all the jats needed for the social and socio-religious life of the Buddhist Newars, like the Jyapu, Nau, Khadgi, and Kusle. The Jyapus play the most important role in the community. They are not only farmers providing food, but are also important in the ritual activities of all the jats higher than them. They play a vital role as messengers in the social ceremonies of all these higher jat groups of Newars. There is a special Jyapu group known as suwa, which provides special services during the various festivals in Bungamati. It is believed that they come from the families of Jyapus that participated in bringing Machhendranath to the Valley. Those who work as suwas need to keep their hair long and follow certain religious rules and regulations. They are an integral part of the Machhendranath and Bhairav rituals and jatras, performing sacrifices, and cooking rice for feasts. Their presence is also needed for initiation rituals of the Sakya and Vajracharya boys, since they assist in holding the ritual umbrellas over the head of the initiates. Today, the suwas have dwindled from eight to just three due to lack of interest and limited economic benefit. Besides suwas, Jyapus are also traditional music players for festivals, funerals and rituals, while Jyapu women serve as midwives. Jyapu also serve as dooly (palanquin) bearers in marriages as well as in some jatras. In feasts and ceremonies, their services are indispensable, whether in the capacity of a musician or that of a servant. In digu deya worship they are the carriers of worshipping materials, even cooked food, which normally is not permissable for the lower jats to touch. Jyapus, however, do not render ritual services to the jats below them. As many anthropologists have mentioned, Jyapus can be Buddhists or Hindus, e.g. Suwal
of Bhaktapur are considered to be Siva Margi Jyapus but in some localities they consider themselves to be both. In Bungamati, I found the Maharjans observing all the Hindu festivals although they use Gubaju as their domestic priest and participate in the Buddhist rituals. The number of Jyapus rendering services as servants has reduced in Bungamati recently. They work as paid labourers but not necessarily to landlords. They own lands and cultivate their own field and some have also learned the art of wood crafting and opened up businesses in the village.

Plate 8. (Left) Suwas in their ritual robes on the day of Bhairav Jatra after performing animal Sacrifice at the Hayagriviwa temple in Bungamati. (Right) Suwa holding a ritual umbrella over the head of a Sakya boy in the Bare Chhuyigu rite

Nau (Barber) has an important role to play in the Newar socio-ritual life of those groups up to level III (Jyapus) in the general Newari ranking system. The principal role consists in ritually purifying individual, they are required for Bu-Sakha (hair-cutting ceremony), kaeta puja (male initiation ritual), Bare Chhuyigu (in the case of Vajracharya and Sakya) and ihi (female initiation rites) where they provide important ritual tasks like cutting hair, cutting nails, and painting the feet. In Bungamati there are few Nau households and they serve the clean higher jats from Priest to the farmer jat.
Chapter 7

Among the unclean *jats*, Naye/Khadgi has an important role in the Newar social life. Besides being butchers and milk sellers, they are also required as musicians in funerals. In Bungamati there are few Khadgi households who fulfill the above functions, they also perform sacrifices of buffaloes at various festivals, *jatras* and rituals of the village as the *suwas* only perform sacrifices of lamb, goat and ducks. There is one Khadgi *Baidya* (medicine man) in Bungamati to whom people consult when they are ill. They are also needed for cutting the umbilical cord of the new-born baby and giving the baby few drops of water. In other parts of the valley they have various function in festivals and temples like Talleju and Guheshwari.

Kusle (Kapali) *jat* has to provide auspicious music during marriage and Diwali worship. On the seventh day of mourning, he accepts cooked rice in the name of the dead. They also work as tailors. We find few households in Bungamati who perform these services to the people there. They also act as *Deo-palas* (temple attendants) in some temples like Kirtipur’s Bagh Bhairav temple.

Other untouchable *jats* like Pore, Kullu and Chyame have few significant ritual functions in the Newari community of Bungamati. I did not find any Chyame family in Bungamati and didn't hear anyone mention the name. Pore is commonly mentioned. Pore *jat* sells fish and baskets and also work as sweepers and may also perform other manual work. They are however not very likely to get even the lowest post in the office because of their position as untouchables in the *jat* hierarchy. Since there is no public execution, his traditional services for this task are not required any longer. Pore households are lowest in number. This is a common feature in most Newar settlements as I gathered from many publications on Newars.

In the Newar society I found that the polluted *jats* are not discriminated from temples as is common in the other caste society of South Asia. Many polluted *jats* are *deo-palas* in the temples in the Valley and touch the idols in the temple freely.

Though the caste system in the Newar society seem to be intricate, most Newars maintain the traditional belief that the Hindu King Jayasithi Malla imposed *jat* on them. I was also told a story to support the fact that the *jat* division was not to discriminate between higher and lower or clean and unclean status but merely to group people on the criteria of their work. When Jayasithi Malla ruled over the Newars, he called upon the people and asked
them to volunteer for the various jobs that were needed in the society. Some volunteered to be priests, others to farm, and thus they were named. However, there was still one job for which there was no volunteer, it was the work of a butcher. Since no one wanted to do the job, the King’s son volunteered for it and was called Kasai/Khadgi. He was not of lower status or an untouchable. This tale may however be an ideological element in the Khadgis’ struggle to legitimize claims for a higher ritual rank corresponding to their recent greatly improved economic position.
Chapter 8

8 KINSHIP, HOUSEHOLD AND MARRIAGE

I will give a brief account of kinship and marriage in Bungamati without going into elaborate details about it. What I found and observed in Bungamati, may have some similarities as well as differences compared to the rest of Newar community in the valley. In Bungamati, Newars divide their agnatic kin into different categories distinguished primarily by the degree of mourning observed at death. For e.g., members of a household must avoid eating until the cremation procession departs if someone of distant category has died; in the case of the middle category (phuki in Newari; terah dine dajubhai in Nepali), festivals are not observed, women do not beautify themselves, men cover their head for the seven or twelve-day period; among the closest kins, the degree of mourning depends on the individual's relation to the dead. For a deceased father, mother or husbands, the period of mourning lasts for a year; in the case of a wife, the mourning period is forty-five days. Women observe four days of mourning for a death in their natal household.

As Gellner (1995) mentions, today the lineage splits are more common due to reasons that benefits of small-scale celebrations far outweigh any possible benefits which solidarity with a wider range of kin might bring. In Bungamati, there is also much declination on the joint family. I observed that those with less property and income, split faster than those households with better economic position because each individual has to find his/her own means of livelihood, as the ancestral property cannot support a joint household. In a household of many siblings, some may get higher salaried job and after marriage may prefer to move out of the house. Many joint families split after the sons get married. In Bungamati, there are very few rich houses; the richer ones have left the village and moved to city areas. We can find a good number of nuclear families in the village. Various reasons were given for a split in the family, like finance or the lack of good rapport between the mother and daughter-in-law.

A case of Tuladhar family in ward no.1 of Bungamati can be taken as a common example of a splitting household. The family has two sons and the elder brother said that he moved out of the house after he got married because his mother and wife could not get along. His family did not own much land; he needed to make a living of his own so he
received his small share of the property and started his woodcraft business. He now has a small modern house next to his parents, while his younger brother lives in the parents’ house and also owns his own woodcraft business. He said that the relationship between his mother and wife is better now. In most families, I found the youngest son living with the parents, mainly because the older ones get married first. People say that after the marriage, the reasons for the split is either because women in the household do not get along or because of financial matters. One brother may have a better earning, he may not like to spend it in the house of a joint family; the wife may pressure him to separate so they can be financially better off especially if the parents are not rich and may not have much property. He gets out with his share of property or without it if there is not much to share, so does the next brother if there are many brothers. Sometimes the split may be due to marriage with the lower jat which pressures a person to move out of the main house either voluntarily or involuntarily. In Bungamati, this is quite common in cases of inter-jat marriage. Majority of the villagers seem to be quite comfortable with nuclear family. The households may separate for some reason or the other but the ties with the main house or with the parents are not broken unless there has been some bad dispute in which the kin relation is broken. I did not find much criticism regarding nuclear families because most of the splits in the family occur after the sons are married; if there are many brothers, it is better for some of them to find their own housing than be crowded in the parent’s home especially if the house is not big enough to hold the extended family. Even the older generation seem to be accepting it especially if problems stem from lack of rapport between women in the household or drinking habit of the sons.

In the Newar community of Bungamati ‘paju’ (mother’s brother) has an important part in the life-cycle rituals and so has ‘nini’ (father’s sister). This is not very different from other Parbatiya groups or Newars from other parts of the valley. Actually paju and nini owe this service to the nephews and nieces for the entire life unless the relationship has been cut off due to some reason or the other. The birth purification ceremony is an important one for the immediate agnatic kin (phuki). If the brothers have separate households, they need to be invited for the purification ceremony, which is held four days after the birth of a child. Failing to do this will automatically cut off the closeness of blood relationship, which is shown by not observing the death pollution. Kins are
important in the Newari society but there are also cases where kinship, even among the closest blood relations, is broken. I found the main cause of this breakup to be almost invariably related to inheritance, i.e. disagreements about property distribution among the brothers. When the blood relations through dispute want to have no relation with each other, I was told that they express it as *pani bahek*[^23] in Bungamati, meaning that the two families will stop drinking water from each other’s house signifying the relationship is cut off. This will automatically cut off the closeness of kinship like ritual relationship between them. When one does not accept water, it means one cannot participate in any of the rituals nor eat at the same table; no observation of pollution in death or birth is performed, and no participation in feasts or ceremonies is attempted.

In the Newari households, the practice of bowing down (*dhoknu*) to senior members in the family is common. The younger males bow to senior males on rituals or ceremonial occasions, and in everyday household interactions. In *guthi* feasts and meetings too, this is common and obligatory. Seating arrangements in the feasts are also particular about the seniors occupying the first places on the right followed by juniors. The married daughter-in-law has to bow down to the senior men and women before eating during family feasts and after daily worship. Women in the household usually eat meals after the males have eaten and daughter- in-laws are usually the last ones to eat.

Most marriages in Bungamati are simple affairs. Very few can afford to do the elaborate formal Newari marriages, which I will not go into detail about. In the simple marriage, the man brings a woman home; the family decides on an auspicious date to introduce the bride to the *digu deya guthi* (*phuki* members); the bride distributes beetle nuts among the members, which is a symbol of acceptance into the household by the *phuki* members. She is also introduced to the "*digu deya*” of the family in the *digu deya* worship thus becoming a member of the lineage group (*diwali/digu deya guthi*); a feast is organized for the family members, *phuki* members, and maybe a few friends. There are some

[^23]: Nepali term which the old civil law (*Muluki Ain*) used. It means expulsion or outcast from the society and cutting off water communication on the grounds of committing some immoral act like having sexual relationship with the untouchable caste, incest, adultery, or having food and water touched or cooked by the low untouchable caste. This practice of subjecting people to *Pani Bahek* has been abolished by the new civil law (*Muluki Ain*) in Bhadra V.S.2000. However, people in their social life still use this expression to communicate expulsion or cutting off relationship with one another.
households who can afford a big wedding and have elaborate ritual ceremonies and feasting lasting for a few days.

Marriage is invariably virilocal and patrilocal as in most groups in the country. I found that the villagers had contempt for any man living with his wife and her parents. To be “ghar jwai” (a Nepali term also used by Newars) was not a respectable position for a man according to them. This was clearly stated by the villagers when talking to them. I will briefly show the feelings of men in this regard in the following conversation. To keep the identity of the villagers confidential, I will not use their real names.

**Self:** How long have you been widowed?

**Mr. K.:** It's about 25 years.

**Self:** (I was surprised, he was in his early 50s and to be without wife for so long is not common in our society; only women are widowed for so long). So why didn’t you get another wife?

**Did anyone find a wife for you?**

**Mr. K:** Oh! I have tried and my relatives in Patan have tried too. I am a Paneju and I have to be careful about who I marry; I owe it to the temple and society, I felt. Yes, I have looked everywhere. Whenever I go to Patan, people joke about my search for a wife. I had found some from my own jat, but whenever I found one, someone or the other would frighten them off by saying I have got two sons from my first marriage so it wouldn’t be a good idea to marry me as she may not get any financial security if anything happened to me. It is very selfish of people to do so.

**Self:** Well, wasn't there any other way, like a family with no sons, then the female would not need your property, she would have her own parent's property.

**Mr. K:** Of course! there were women who I could marry and become a ‘ghar jawai’ but it is the last thing a man would do. It is a fate worse than death. No man who calls himself a man would agree to become a ghar jawai.

(every man in the group supported his idea and were smirking about the idea of a ghar jawai). Only those men who have nothing will agree to become a ghar jawai. There’s a family here in the village with just a daughter and no sons. They wanted a ghar jawai to take care of the property. He could get no good
man (no one would agree to become a ghar jawai), so he got one who had no property, wasted it all drinking and gambling. So the daughter was married but soon the father found that his 'jawai' (son-in-law) was not taking care of his property, he hardly worked in the field but was wasting his money. So he threw him out and found another husband for his daughter but this man turned out to be worse than the other, so the man was thrown out and the first husband was brought in. His daughter will not get any better than that. Look at her, marrying one and divorcing and remarrying again!

Everyone was laughing and sniggering)

Self: Well, it must be tough finding someone for you.

Mr. K: Yes, it's very sad, I feel lonely even though I have children and grandchildren (his younger son and family lives with him). Recently, I decided that I would not care what society says and I'll find someone from ‘Pani chalne jat’ (water acceptable jat) since I have not been able to get one from my own jat.

Self: Will it not be a problem for you if you marry someone lower than you even if it is ‘pani chalne jat’ because you will not be able to eat boiled rice cooked by her?

Mr. K: Well, it really is not a problem, I can purify the boiled rice by adding ‘pure ghee’ (animal fat, could be either of cow or buffalo). Recently I had found someone but it did not work out and I am still alone.

Divorce is not very common among Newars especially among some of the higher thar in Bungamati even though anthropologists like G.S. Nepali have mentioned the freedom of Newari women to divorce being comparatively easier than Parbatiya women. The women in Newari society definitely enjoy the strong support of her ‘thachem” (natal home). Marriages among the Newars are frequently made near at hand, so the contact can be easily maintained with the natal home. The frequency among Newari women visiting her natal home is higher than Parbatiya women. This visit is encouraged by the natal home. Among the Parbatiyas, regular visits to Maiti (natal home), is not encouraged; a married daughter is expected to visit her natal home occasionally and on special occasions with proper invitation. Newari women visit their home whenever they like and can spend a number of days there. The ihi ritual (mock marriage to a deity) is of great
importance to the position of women in the Newar society. Firstly, the women are not exposed to the consequences of mortal widowhood, which Parbatiya women are. Another significance of *ihi* ritual is that at the conclusion of the *ihi* puja, the Newar girl is initiated into her father’s lineage. She will retain important responsibilities to this lineage even after shifting her lineage membership to that of her husband after marriage and will be invited to many of the celebrations of life cycle rites and festivals held at her father’s home. In case of a divorce, women can take back all the gifts given in marriage to her by friends and families; Parbatiya women do not have this advantage.

I was talking to men and women about the recent political change and how they felt about the freedom to vote. Everyone felt good about the new system of government although skeptical about the leaders chosen. Women in their choice of candidates seem to be very independent; they do not seem pressured or feel pressured by the husband or his household in choosing the political candidate. Men admitted that women seem to be more supportive to the choice of their natal home, and supported the candidate chosen by their natal household even though their husbands may have wanted otherwise.

8.1 **Inter-*jat* marriage**

There are some inter-*jat* marriages, although no such marriage has taken place formally. It is the kind of marriage where two people stay together, and the families later will do the necessary rituals to make them part of the family circle. Inter-*jat* marriage has also been crucial in the growth of a large part of Tuladhar *thars* in Bungamati. In the village, inter-*jat* marriages like those between the high *jat* Sakya or Shrestha male and Maharjan (Jyapu) female, have also given rise to Tuladhar *thars*, which may not be the case in every Newari village or city. The issue of citizenship card, where the children are automatically named from father's surname have given the villagers the chance to move up the *jat* ladder if the father is of higher *jat* and some have done so. However, the surname of the high *jat* father remains only in the paper (Citizenship). For instance, there is a household in Bungamati where the husband is Sakya and the wife is Tuladhar. In such a marriage the children will be accepted as Tuladhar in the socio-religious life of the Bungamati Newars. The citizenship certificate will give the children the father’s name “Sakya” unless the department issuing the citizenship is told that the children will
actually go by the surname of “Tuladhar” in their social life. This household has given the children the father’s name “Sakya” even though the children are not accepted as members of Sakya si guthi in the village, and they are not eligible for the post of Paneju in the Machhendranath temple. In the village socio-religious life, their ritual rank will be that of Tuladhar; they can be Sakya only in the Citizenship certificate. According to the Bungamati residents, most villagers use the name which is actually accepted in their society and socio-religious institution (si guthi) for their citizenship certificate by explaining their situation to the concerned department but there are some who take advantage of the opportunity to give the children the higher rank of their father even though socially they may not be accepted as such.

Inter-jat marriages between the pure and untouchable jats make the children impure and the men lose their pure jat; they may also lose their inheritance or relation with the household members. In Bungamati there has been a case where a Sakya man married a Pore (water unacceptable jat) female. The brothers were not thrilled, and one of them moved away to a separate place. He was not given a place to stay at the house but the villagers felt sorry for the man and appealed to the brothers to let him stay. The other brother who lived in the house committed suicide; some hinted that the suicide had been due to the marriage with the unclean women and having to share the house with her, though there was no clear answer from anybody as to why he did it. I found that inter-jat marriage is common in Bungamati among those of closer jat ranks but I did not find any significant number between the clean and unclean jats.

If the daughter of the house marries a man of Khadgi or Pore jat (water unacceptable), she will not be able to participate in the various rituals and festivals in her parents’ home as a member of the household because she can no longer enter the kitchen. She will be invited to feasts at home but will have to remain on the ground floor of the house. In some cases, she may not be able to offer the last water to her parents at their death beds, or before the cremation. There are some households who allow this but the majority are not comfortable with it. When the son in the house marries outside his jat, especially the untouchable or the unclean jat, he usually leaves his parent’s home and lives separately. He can however, perform all the rituals of his household like death ceremonies, and giving of water to the dying parents, if married to a water acceptable jat, although his
wife may not be able to participate in the main rituals. The children from the wife of water unacceptable (*majyupim*) *jat* will take the *jat* of their mother and so does the husband. According to the people in Bungamati, if a Maharjan (Jyapu) or Sakya marries a Pore woman (unclean *jat*), the children of the union will be Pore, and the man will also become a Pore. If a high *jat* man marries a woman from water acceptable (lower but of water exchangeable line) *jat*, the children become Tuladhar in most cases (true in Bungamati, it may not be so in other localities or villages). Most Tuladhars in Bungamati are descended from a mixed Sakya male and Tuladhar female marriages, and in some cases from Sakya/Shrestha male and Maharjan (Jyapu) female Marriages. Today, the new trends of social mobility, relaxation of *jat* barriers is more common among those near-ranking *jats* within water exchangeable line. But again if one looks at the *si guthi* in the Newari society in Bungamati, relaxation in such inter-*jat* marriages (even with water exchangeable *jats*) do not seem to have taken place as children of such marriages are not easily accepted in the higher *jat si guthi* of the father.
9 LIFE IN THE VILLAGE

Life in Bungamati seems to be pretty similar to other Newari villages, alternating between hectic days during the cultivation period, followed by incorporation of various festivals and rituals of social and religious life. The village being close to the city employment has an extra advantage of gathering extra income source not common in the remote villages; this leaves less time for agricultural activities even though it is still the most common occupation in Bungamati. As in most Newari villages, worship and devotion to various gods are part of their daily life. I often saw women starting their day of worship with a basket of flowers, vermilion powder, and flowers on their head visiting different temples and shrines. They usually greet neighbours and relatives on the way, sometimes sitting and chatting in the absence of work at home or in the fields. Young married women in general have less of a free time. A housewife’s day starts early in the morning (4 or 5 a.m. in the morning and earlier if there are festivals, ceremonies and rituals) purifying the house with ‘nilah’ (pure water). The house is swept and cleaned, and the water vessels are washed and filled with fresh and unpolluted water from the public tap; water can be polluted by the touch of untouchables (thiye majyupim) or water unacceptable jats (majyupim), and cats and dogs. When fresh and pure water is taken to the kitchen and inner sanctum of the house, the housewife calls out so that no one stands on the stairs or anywhere above her while carrying the water as this pollutes the water. The water is sprinkled in the house to purify it before worshipping household gods, and getting on with other related chores. Newars always use fresh water for drinking and worshipping; water that has been stored overnight is not considered fresh. They start off by worshipping Kumar (Siva and Parvati’s son) at the entrance of the house; the majority of Newars in Bungamati worship Bhimsen and Laximi in their daily household worship. Bhimsen and Laximi are both gods of prosperity and wealth so it is understandable why Newari farmers, merchants or craftsmen, worship these gods.

Newars are regarded as more religious than other Nepalese communities because of the number of regular worships, and the number of religious jatras and festivals they participate in, although worship to a Newar is a traditional every-day work which does not involve serious spiritualism, except on rare occasions.
Chapter 9

Most Newar houses have at least three or more floors. The kitchen, and place of worship is on the top floor, and it is a restricted area. Untouchables (thiye majyupim) and water unacceptable (majyupim) jats are allowed only on the ground floor. The house as also mentioned by some anthropologists, has a *mandala* pattern found in their settlement model. The ground floor is regarded as the outer part of the house and untouchables are allowed in this area; this part is therefore polluted like the outer rim of the village or city where the untouchables, cremation ground and the shrines of mother goddesses are situated. When a person dies, the dead body is also placed on the ground floor. Most water acceptable (jyupim) jats are allowed on the second floor, which is mostly a living quarter; this floor houses the bed rooms, and those who have bigger houses, living rooms with TV and sofas. The third floor is usually the kitchen where drinking, cooking and worshipping-water, is stored. Water is mostly stored in vessels that can be washed; in the olden days when earthen vessels were used, the vessels had to be thrown away if touched by *majyupim* or thiye *majyupim* jats.

Though legal abolition of *jat* distinctions and water was abolished many years ago, those distinctions or divisions still exist as of today. The village space occupied by various *jats* shows the organization of society on such division. The village space is divided according to various *jats*; for instance in ward 3 we find the concentration of Sakya households while in ward 5 and 6, we find Maharjan households. There are few other *jats* among them but basically the majority is one particular *jat*.

Since the end of Rana rule and the period of ‘*Prajatantra*’(democracy) started from the year 1951, the valley has experienced rapid development in education, infrastructure, numerous businesses, foreign agencies and multiparty system of government. As of 1991 these developments serve as a background for new trends in social mobility and relaxation of *jat* barriers to some extent. In Bungamati too, I found people's attitude more relaxed to *jat* barriers (especially among the near-ranking *thars* or *jats*) but there are still some who throw the water away if the water vessel happens to be touched by unclean, and water unacceptable *jats*. I found that the untouchable group avoided touching the higher *jats* and their water vessels when replenishing their own water supply, but again there are some who seem to do just the opposite to prove that times have changed. The difference today as I saw it in the village it is definitely more tolerant; superficially
everyone seems to applaud the idea of equality when spoken publicly: an observation which support some of S. Parish’s arguments in “Hierarchy and its Discontent” (1996). Yet, beneath the surface of this tolerance, people seem to be still struggling with ambivalence in relation to this idea of tolerance in social interaction. The following conversation I had with some people in the village may show the struggle people are going through with regards to changes in jat barriers.

**Self:** I see that most people in the village seem to be tolerant regarding untouchability, pani nachalne jat, inter-caste marriage.

**Mr. G:** Oh! yes! it is long past the days of Rana; today there is democracy and equality, and it is not possible to maintain the rigidity when various groups of people work in the same place and have to eat in the same place. We cannot sit separately from pani nachalne jat in such situations. Today various jats take up same jobs, be it office jobs or as labourers.

**Self:** What about “inside your homes”? Is it acceptable to have the untouchables in your kitchen, touching water and cooked food like bhat (boiled rice)?

**Mrs. S:** Yes, if we are best friends. I don’t mind bringing my best friend to my kitchen even though they may belong to untouchable, pani nachalne jat.

**Self:** Does your mother-in-law allow it?

**Mrs. S:** Well, I don’t live with my in-laws. The older people do not accept it; I think it is alright if the person is your good friend.

**Self:** So marriage is also accepted between the unclean and clean groups?

**Mr. T:** Well no! One has to move out of the house if it happens. If it is within pani chalne jat, it is more easily accepted by the family but they will not be accepted in the si guthi. If marriage is with pani nachalne jat, one loses one’s jat. The family does not accept it either. Some families may invite such married couples to family feasts but they will only be allowed in the lower part of the house.

**Self:** What about death rituals? If a man marries a woman from pani nachalne jat, will the man be able to offer water to the dead parents and perform death and other rituals?
Mr. G: It depends on the individual households. Si guthi will not accept it. Even among the pani chalne jat the high caste man cannot make his wife (if of lowercaste rank than him) and children, members of his si guthi except in rare cases. There has been a case here in Bungamati when it was difficult to find anybody to cremate the dead body of a Jyapu woman who was married to a Sakya man. Being married to Sakya man she had no guthi because she could not be a member of her husband’s guthi because of her lower rank in the caste hierarchy. Her body lay there for the whole day (which is very uncommon in Newari/Nepali society). Finally some villagers upon much request offered to take her body for cremation. Yes, inter-caste marriage is more tolerated in the individual family but not in the guthi institution.

Self: What about bhoye (feasts) in the village? In these feasts, untouchables and pani nachalne jat are not seated together with the pure jats, are they?

Mr. N: No, when we invite village people for marriage or other feasts, we place the pani nachalne (majyupim) separately from the rest of the group because of the pollution that is caused by touch while eating. Recently, changes are taking place, which is a little unacceptable to me. There is a young man in the village, from the pani nachalne group (majyupim); he dresses very well like the actors (meaning Nepali/ Indian films) and he’ll always sit with the higher caste where he should not be. In every feasts in the village he is allowed to sit in the same group as the pani chalne groups just because he is dressed well and looks good. The hosts do not say anything to him while the rest of the pani nachalne group are seated separately. I protested in the last feast; I told the group I was sitting with that he should not be sitting with us; he should sit where others of his caste members are sitting. He would not move nor would anyone say anything just because he is well dressed. I was really annoyed and I got up and did not eat in the same group.

Mr. T: I don't like this trend in Bungamati feasts. I know there are instances where the son (water unacceptable cast) being a friend of the host (high caste) is allowed to sit with the high caste in the feasts while the father is placed among the untouchables or pani nachalne jat. I think if the father is polluting, the son
should be polluting too. If the son is accepted as not polluting, the father should be treated as such. I don’t like this bias treatment. Since the law changed regarding the pani nachalne jat and untouchables, the trend of tolerance in the village has been seeing these kinds of biasness.

From the above conversation, we can see that people are struggling with the new ideas regarding equality in social interaction between members of different jats. It is easier to practice tolerance outside homes, e.g., in workplaces, in restaurants and other public places. In the villages, it is difficult to make the best decision regarding jat barriers when everyone is aware of each other’s thar/jat identity. When someone is well dressed and appears to be educated and smart, it is difficult to place the person as untouchable; it must also be difficult to place one’s good friend (an invited guest in a feast) separated from oneself while eating because of his impure identity. Today, the law does not punish such mixing, so it is easier to be biased when it involves one’s friend. It is equally difficult for people to understand the biasness when one from the same unclean group is allowed to be placed in a position where he might pollute the higher jats, while the rest of his jat are placed separately because they might pollute. Today the decision of discrimination lies on the individual. In the Rana times and earlier, it was a punishable crime to pollute, so one would not dare to do what is being done in Bungamati today. In the Rana regime, manipulation was not possible because one could file a case if such a manipulation contaminated the other party in the group. For example, if a majyupim (water unacceptable) touched the water of a jyupim (water acceptable jat), a case of contamination would be filed by the contaminated. The court would regard the act a crime and the criminal would be fined. An old receipt dated 1994 V.S. shows the payment of fine for touching water of the jyupim jat by majyupim jat. The line of such discrimination is no longer enforced by the State.

Figure VI. An old receipt showing the payment of fine of Rs. 3/- by the untouchable jat for having polluted the water of the ritually high ranked jat.
I was told that sometimes the unclean *jats* purposely touch the drinking water of the clean *jats* in the village (maybe as a provocation), as an act of opposition to the *jat* ideology. Usually they keep away when the clean *jats* are filling water. So the changing trend in social interaction among the various groups in Bungamati depends on the nature of relationship between the individual persons as well as the economic position of a person. I observed that in the normal everyday interaction, one is very much identified with one’s ritual ranking especially if one is of lower rank and the occupation is also as such. I often heard people saying “there! The Pore is coming!” when they see a Pore. I do not think they would have made such identification if the low *jat* Pore had better economic and social position in the society or even better dressed for that matter. They would have been addressed with respect even though grudgingly.

This however, does not imply that there is no struggle to climb the rank level, to camouflage the *jat* identity by use of surname and hide in its ambiguity; for e.g., a Khadgi/Kasai in Bungamati told me he is “Sahi”. I was later told that he is Kasai but uses Sahi as his *thar* (surname). To the villagers, his *jat* identity is known but from an outsider he can hide in the ambiguity of the surname.

Some forms of changes are also seen in gender discrimination; some men do help in the household chores and have positive thoughts towards sharing household work. In the majority of the cases though, I still see women doing most of the cooking, cleaning and washing as well as taking care of the old, the children and the home. After the cooking and the rest of kitchen chore is completed, women come out of the house to wash clothes or bathe the children in the public tap; they sometimes go to the Nakhu River if they have a lot of washing to do. The overall care for the children is also the work of women. During the peak cultivation season, women start work in the field as early as possible after their household chores; they take flattened rice and curry as snacks to be eaten during the day of work in the fields. Men perform heavier tasks of hoeing the field by means of short-handled hoe (*kodali* in Nepali, *Ku* in Newari) and women break up the clods with long-handled wooden hammer and carefully level the ground. Women do most of the agricultural work in the village like weeding, planting, and harvesting. Men help in carrying the heavy harvest loads; those households having bigger agricultural land have more male members involved in agricultural work. Today, some farmers hire men from...
Danwar village lying south of Bungamati, to plough their field. Besides the agricultural work, and household chores, some women also help their husbands in the business of woodcraft, and carpet weaving (although this is done mostly by young unmarried girls as housewives do not have time). Women also make *aeyla* (home made spirit/alcohol), and *thon* (home made beer). The whole process is time consuming but essential for festivals and especially for hired workers during the time of cultivation. Men seem to have little to do with the *aeyla* making process as they are not able to tell the various procedures needed; they advised me to talk to the women about it. Thus it is not surprising to walk around the village and find many men scattered around sunning and chatting in groups, while most females are either heading to the fields or busily washing clothes in the public taps or bathing children. Infact, it was so difficult to get a chance to talk to women as they were occupied with work all the time. Women were naturally shy too; even if they had time they would not be standing around in the public square or roadside, chatting and sunning.

Newars as a community show strong unity in religious, ritual and social affairs; most non-Newars talk of Newars as having strong cooperative communal feelings. I expressed this thought to the Newars in Bungamati and many disagreed with regards to the cooperative part. They informed me that though they may be united in their ritual and social affairs as it is their cultural distinction in contrast to the *Parbatiyas*, but cooperation at individual level is a different matter. “When it comes to individual cooperation, the Newars are not so cooperative. Parbatiyas (Brahman/Chhetri) help their fellow Parbatiyas with acquirement of jobs, etc., but our Newars turn their back if they see us coming for help, they are afraid that we might be more prosperous. Infact, they even ruin our chance if they can”, said a Bungamati resident; a majority of the villagers expressed this view. I figured that although cooperation is common on the cultural and social matters, competition for prestige at many different levels is a dominant concern. Social and cultural cooperation do not seem to be translated to economic cooperation. Beneath the surface of easy-going, laughing attitude, I found undercurrent of envy, jealousy, spite, anger, and it invariably had to do with the prestige of financial prosperity and honour. Today, honour “*ijat*” can be bought by wealth; some villagers expressed this view when talking about their fellow villagers spending lots of money they
can ill afford on feasts; so economic prosperity seems to be everyone’s goal because it can be converted into a range of tangible and intangible values. People in the village sell their land in order to throw a big feast for the life-cycle of rituals like Ihi and kaeta Puja in pursuit of social honour, which seem to be an important fact of everyday Newar life. This is not uncommon among the other non-Newar communities.

In Bungamati, being a Paneju (Machhendranath priest) is a great social honour. Although most people are respectful and bow to the priests, I found there are some who make spiteful remarks towards them especially after the incident of a Paneju involved in some shady dealings with a god image. Some Panejus expressed deep regret for such an act by one of them but were also saddened that people were spiteful enough to categorize them as thieves just because one had made a mistake.

I was, however, completely taken by surprise to find out that one of the new Panejus had paid Rs.100,000/- (over US $1000/-) to attain the position. I was told the position is not merely inherited, but one has to be able to pay the price acquiring the inheritance. Some Panejus explained to me that it was like bidding for a tender. When a member dies, his place is contested by those eligible males from Sakya households if it is a Sakya place and by the Vajracharya males if it is a Vajracharya place. I met Panejus who paid a negligible sum of about few hundred rupees sometime ago but recently the trend have changed. The bidding takes place in the Machhendranath guthi office in Patan. I was told that it was honour (ijat) and prestige, which was at stake in the bidding competition. People go wild as the bidding escalates and it also results in terrible disputes, arguments and sometimes even in fights. A number of people are not happy about this kind of development because it not only reduces the chances of any worthwhile candidate competing for the position, but also reduces the sacredness of the position. I asked the Paneju who paid Rs. 100,000/- for the post, the following question: “Why did you put up so much money? Is it like an investment for future economic benefits which will ultimately cover the investment?”

He replied back saying: “No, economically we don’t get much. For me, it is for dharma, it is for the continuation of culture and tradition, and we get honour and prestige in the society”.

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I talked to many Panejus both young and old and found out that the older ones had paid far less than the younger ones. Recently it has been around Rs. 80,000/- and above; surprisingly I did come across one who paid only around Rs.6000/- even though he is of a younger generation, and the competition could have gone to higher biddings. But he told me that he applied in place of his father (who was dead) even though it was not easy. He applied for consideration on the ground that his line of family had served the temple as Panejus for generations, and since he could not afford to pay more than Rs.6000/- it was unfair if he could not work in his father’s place when he had already been trained by his father. He was finally told to write an application of appeal, which the State would consider. He was then given the post. The competition for this religious post after all seems to be somewhat constrained by considerations of legitimate succession.

Although according to the Panejus, the financial benefit is not much, we cannot totally rule out the financial benefit. Panejus are given land for their use as ‘bhatta’ (payment) from the Machhendranath guthi, and can have the earnings during the period of daily service as a temple priest which may not amount to as much because it has to be rotated among the 31 Panejus. They can, however, get over Rs. 100,000/- during the annual Machhendranath Jatra. This chance, however, comes only once to each Paneju in his lifetime of holding the office. At each annual festival, two Panejus take turn to be the main priests and attendants of the festival and therefore receive all festival proceedings. For many social rituals and religious feasts throughout the year, they get a share of offerings. There are however many restrictions to the life of a Paneju. Marriage has to be either within the Sakya or Vajracharya thars if rules are to be followed. Manipulation of such rules is always possible, though not common. They have to rigidly follow food purity and pollution. Each Paneju has the duty of being a temple priest for a period of 15 days at one turn. Five days before taking up the temple duty, they have to practice rigid purity. They eat separately in a rigidly guarded pure condition and family members can eat only after he has eaten. The water they drink and the water for bathing should not be touched by anyone but themselves. In the olden days, well water was used for bathing and they themselves had to draw water out of the well. With the coming of water taps in the village, the priests use tap water for bathing and worshiping as it is much easier to get water from the tap. It was difficult for the older Panejus to draw water from the well.
especially in winter when the water was too cold. During the 15 days’ temple duty they can eat only once in a day. They can eat rice, banana, milk, and ginger. It is believed that if one of these foods become polluted, the pollution shows up in the milk they drink and the rice they eat; the milk goes bad when they are about to drink it, and the other grains appear in the rice if polluted. When this happens they cannot drink milk or eat rice for 15 days. Although the benefits may not be much in this respect, it does have some amount of financial benefit. Besides, their social rank goes up, as they form an important part of the society, respected and honoured, and opens doors to other areas such as social workers and leaders. Such influence may be converted into political positions. Recently, one of the Panejus had competed in the election. Though he was not successful that time, he feels he will be one day.

Ijat (honour) is shared by a household, and can also be shared by members of an institution like the Paneju guthi. The household ijat is at stake for instance, if the daughter elopes, especially with a lower jat man. This is referred to as one’s honour, or in literal translation, as one’s nose being cut (nakh katyo in Nepali). When a member of a household prospers or accomplishes something praiseworthy, it is referred to as ‘ghar ko nakh rakhideyo” (a Nepali expression that literally means ‘kept the nose of the house’). In the case of an institution like Paneju guthi, the ijat is in the hands of its members. When one of them gets involved in something dishonourable, the ijat of the group is at stake. Some Panejus commented in reference to the recent involvement of a Paneju in shady dealings of stolen a god image: “He should not have worn the red cloth around him, which shows he is a Paneju; if he had not put on the red cloth, no one would know he is a Paneju.” “It is so shameful” said one of the Panejus.

In Bungamati, Tuladhrs are dubbed as being “chalakh”, meaning that they are prosperous and successful in pursuit of worldly goods; no one can trick or deceive them. Maharjans are regarded as less chalakh (most probably because they work as farmers and are less exposed to other business fields). Manual labour and agricultural work are considered lower ranked tasks. If an office worker or businessman is seen weeding one's garden or carrying a load, people are shocked. “This is common all over the country,” said a Tuladhar man (man of high social position in the village). He gave an example of what happened to him while he was gardening. It so happened that some Jyapu villagers
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saw him gardening and they were surprised and upset at what he was doing; they told him that a man in his position should not resort to doing such menial work and offered to do the gardening for him.
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10 THE NATURAL, SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUSLY IMAGINED LIFE OF WATER

The natural movement of water from the sea, evaporation and condensation (formation of clouds and dew), the rainfall and its accumulation in lakes, ponds, rivers, groundwater and springs represent different natural “stations” in the hydrological trajectory of water. Man can also manipulate this natural trajectory in different ways through construction of dams, canals, watermills etc. When such modification occurs, the natural trajectory is, to some extent, commodified - rights in water becomes restricted, control over water becomes a source of power, and water can be transacted for irrigation, drinking, or other purposes. My goal is to try to show how people in Bungamati have spun meanings around natural and man-made stations and transformations in the trajectories of water.

In my fieldwork I have used this concept as a focus in my search for causal and semiotic contexts affecting man-water interactions. My presentation however, first dwells on the contexts I have discovered, and that being done, I will now proceed to sort out how processes in these different contexts interact to bring about the “real” and “imagined” trajectories of water.

Plate 9. The Hydrological Trajectory of Water
The transformations and states of water illustrated in this diagram is actually a modified version of “The natural trajectory of water”, extracted from Odum’s (1989) ecological text-book. Although the natural law processes underlying them may not be clearly understood by people in Bungamati, they are phenomenal of both practical and symbolic concerns for people.

The water from the seas evaporate and form clouds or condense from which water drop as rain, and is collected in seas, rivers, lakes and oceans. Some of this water flows underground. This underground movement, the natural trajectory, though not actually seen by the people, is given meaning; the sacredness of one water place through its natural trajectory is sanctified in the belief that the various holy waters move through imagined underground streams and mingle with each other. Here, the trajectory of water is not primarily caused by the social processes of commodification that Appadurai talks about. This natural trajectory, devoid of meaning in itself according to Rappaport’s perspective, becomes symbolically significant to the people of this society, because the people confer meaning to various “stations” in water’s trajectories. The forces of “nature” no matter what they really are, impinge on people everywhere, and people must have a working knowledge of how to cope with them in order to satisfy not only their biological needs but also their socio-religious needs. In the “life world” of Bungamati or Nepal as a whole, socio-religious life of the people is part of the moral order of society.

Let’s start out by looking at one “station” in this trajectory, namely Dew.

10.1 Dew (Seet)

Dews are formed when humidity in the air is condensed and is caused by the change in temperature. When the temperature is cold, the air condenses and forms dew; when it is warm, it evaporates. The whole process is elusive to the people; it is visible at one moment and gone the next. In Bungamati’s life world, this elusive quality of nature’s trajectory is regarded as Amrita -- potion of immortality possessed only by the gods. The Newars told me that they regard dew as amrita, and if one is able to drink it, one gains immortality. Amrita is regarded as having high medicinal values, and when taken, death can be avoided and illnesses cured, which is equivalent to gaining immortality like the
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gods; but it is elusive. In Buddhist terms “the world of dew” is that of appearances, and is a sign of the ephemeral nature of material things and the brevity of life.

While the Newars in Bungamati spin an elusive, mystical quality into water in its form as dew, Barth (1975) shows a different web of significance woven around dew among the Baktamans of New Guinea. The boys in this community use dew to wash their body in the initiation rites. The significance of washing the body with dew instead of running water is the belief that it retains the growth and strength of the initiates while the use of running water will wash away, instead of retaining, the growth. While Newars have made one attribute of dew, i.e. its short time of existence as the salient feature in the meaning they confer on it, the Baktamans have made another attribute of dew -- its contrast with flowing water salient in their dew symbolism.

In the Newar community the contrast between the mortality of men and the immortality of gods is expressed in a contrast between those who are not able to collect dew, i.e. man, and those who constantly carry it, i.e. the gods.

This amrita symbolism is then associated with another highly visible water related symbol in Newar villages, namely a small container (kamandalu or tumbi); this container usually made of brass or copper has a narrow neck and a wider body and can be carried easily (Please see Plate 18). The container is a particular insignia of the yogin -- a person who is both mortal and divine. The mortal yogis transport the waters of renowned tirthas for long distances, so as to prolong the contact with the sacred substance. It is in these types of containers that gods carry amrita.

Plate 10. Kamandalu
10.2 Purna Kalasa

The conventional symbolism of dew is again (I believe) associated with the sacredness or auspiciousness of water in another type of container -- *Purna Kalasa*\(^{24}\). When this container is filled with water and plants (in most cases it is flowers/certain plants/just leaves) it becomes sanctified and auspicious. *Purna kalasa* can be seen in many parts of people’s lives in the valley and in the country as a whole. It often flanks the doorways of temples and shrines; some real, some symbolic, and it lines the processional way of mortal and immortal. As Slusser (1982) puts it, “The *Purna Kalasa* is at once the productive womb and inexhaustible cornucopia”. Bowls filled with flowers and plants, from which strong pillars and columns arises, are found in most temples, doorways, buildings and houses in the valley. The entrance of a building or place is always flanked by *Purna Kalasa* for important occasions or events (be it at the State level or just individuals). It is believed that *Purna Kalasa* signifies the generosity of gods and often sanctifies and seals the words of kings. A *kalasa* filled with water and flowers is compulsory in all worship of gods, be it a simple daily household worship or a complicated ritual worship.

*Purna kalasa* also symbolizes mother goddesses; for e.g., goddess Annapurna is seen in this form in *Asan tole* (Kathmandu). *Kalasa* filled with water, flowers, and leaves, symbolizes the presence of goddess Durga on the day of “*Ghata-sthapana*”, which ceremonially announces the beginning of her festival (*Dashain*). Borne of *Purna Kalasa*, the womb, are gods like the Vedic Lord of Water, Varuna, sage Agastya and the celebrated Siva in Patan known as Lord of the Water Pot, *Kumbhesvara*. Water-filled *kalasa* also act as a temporary dwelling place of gods; for instance, when the deity’s image has to be repainted or repaired (before a festival or when damaged) the essence or *atma* (soul) is transferred to such a *Kalasa*. When Machhendranath's image is painted before the annual festival, his *atma* (soul/spirit) is transferred by means of *sadhana* (tantrik power) to water-filled *Kalasa*. Sometimes, gods journey in the same way, e.g.

\(^{24}\) A vessel with narrow neck but a wider opening, rounded body, and of different sizes, mostly used in rituals and worship and made of either brass or copper for the purpose of worship. It is very similar to the vessel used for storing water for household purposes. The difference is that for household purposes, people may use clay or aluminum material but for worship and rituals mostly copper, brass or silver.
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Machhendranath journeyed from Kamrup to the valley as a *purna kalasa*. Thus Changu Narayan and his consorts travel to Hanuman Dhoka on their bi-annual visits.

![Plate 11. Purna Kalasa](image)

In the daily lives of the people, the paired *purna kalasa* on either side of the doorway is used when someone leaves home on a long journey; it is a symbol of blessing, protection, and success, in the journey or on the arrival after a long journey. *Purna Kalasa* is used in marriage in the *mandab*\(^{25}\) where marriage rituals are performed. When the bridegroom goes to the bride’s house, someone holding the *purna kalasa* leads the marriage procession as a symbol of goodwill and auspiciousness. The usage of *purna kalasa* when someone leaves on a journey, when some great events take place, or when some one arrives or leaves, is related to a belief (I think), that seeing a body of water (well, ponds, vessel filled with water and vegetation) while coming out of a house, signifies auspiciousness. In the folktales of the Valley one also comes across beliefs that if one sees a body of water in one’s dreams, it predicts that one has many enemies. So a body of water also signifies warning or awareness of something inauspicious.

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\(^{25}\) A place made for performing marriage rituals with all the essential items for performing rituals; it has a place for performing ‘*homa*’ (the fire sacrifice) in the center where marriage rituals are performed. Mandabs are made for rites and ceremonies, which require elaborate worship and rituals.
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10.3 Rain Ritual

A “station” in the natural trajectory of water that is of central concern to most of the Newars, is rain. Newar farmers form the majority of population in Kathmandu Valley and for them rain is a fundamental factor in agricultural production. Although Nepal has a monsoon season, drought and subsequent famine is recurrent in the country’s history. Drought is a real concern, in the Kathmandu Valley, hence the incessant preoccupation in quest of rain. Leinhard (1974: 21) points out that many ostensibly ordinary Newar songs in fact originated as rain charms. The importance of ritual practices in Newar society directed towards providing rainfall is therefore understandable.

As chief agents of rain, the naga as we have seen, loom large in the Newar culture. Naga (the sacred serpents) are regarded as the chief agents of rain and water, but there are other powers that play complimentary roles as givers of rain, like Indra, Machhendranath and Bala Kumari. The dependence for rain on naga is understood from the various legends and practices respecting the role of naga in this crucial area of Valley life. One such legend is that of the Twelve-year Well (Barha-barsa Inar) of Musunbahal, Kathmandu.

In the bygone days, King Gunakamadeva sought the advice of a famous Vajracharya priest Santikara, on how to solve the problem of drought and famine that might strike his land. The great tantric priest advised him to woo Karkotaka, the ultimate controller of rain and the king of naga. The king decided to follow the advice and one auspicious day, Santikara, the king and selected workers gathered in Musunbahal, chanting hymns in praise of the snake realm and began to dig a well. After twelve years of excavation the pit opened to the underworld. Karkotaka appeared at the bottom of the well and Santikara and the king intoned 108 hymns in praise of nagaraja (king of the naga). Karkotaka was very pleased and granted them the boon that if drought should fall in Nepal mandala, they should come to the portal of his realm and sing the same 108 hymns at this well after which abundant rain would fall. It so happened that a few years later, there was drought in Kathmandu. The well was opened and ceremonially emptied of its waters but the stone blocking the entrance to the nagaloka (abode or realm of the serpents) could not be removed. Santikara realized that the serpent (naga) of Chobar who resented the praise
showered on the serpent king had caused the problem. By his tantric powers he forced the Chobar naga to manifest himself in the vessel of water set up in the adjacent vihara. He then started writing the 108 hymns in naga’s blood after which he read aloud the blood inscribed hymn causing rain to fall. Santikara declared that in the event of another drought the prayers should be read from the same tantra and stored it in his cave called Santipur at Swayambhunatha. There is also another version to the story where the twelve-year well does not feature in the episode and the 108 hymns were inscribed in the blood offered by the nine nagas. However, the belief that if one recites the 108 hymns inscribed in the blood of nagas will make rain fall is common among Newars, be they Bungamati villagers or villagers from other localities. It is believed that during the reign of Pratapmalla, there was drought again and Pratapmalla went to the cave himself and read the blood inscribed hymns and there was rainfall. The courageous deed is recorded in detail on silapatra (inscriptions on stones) and on painting (G.Vajracharya, 1965a; Slusser, 1979). The twelve-year well still exists in Musunbahal and still believed to work in time of severe drought.

In Narendradeva’s reign, there was a longer period of drought as Gorakhnath had captured the nagas and were immobilized under the meditating Natha (referring to Gorakhnath). Thus the quest for Machhindranath (lord of rain and harvest) began and finally the deity was brought to the Valley in a kalasa through the tantric expertise of Bandhudatta Vajracharya. When Machhindranath arrived, Gorakhnath released the nagas and rain fell. Bungamati and Patan became the two dwelling places of the deity.

The annual festival of Machhindranath is a national festival attended by the King and the deity has a strong popularity among the Newars of the valley. It is said that there has not been a single year when rain has not fallen after the showing of the bejewelled bhoto on the final day of the Machhindranath jatra. The Kumbhesvara mela on Janai Purne day is also rooted in the worship of serpents as the ultimate source of rain. The linga is sheathed with serpents and the bathers at the springfed tank drench the linga, the priests, the crowding worshippers and themselves with water, and this water-play continues for twenty-four hours.

Nagas, the symbol of water, guardian of wealth, and more closely linked to people in their mortal sufferings can be destructive too, just as water itself. When angered, the
unappeased serpent deity can cause drought and famine, death from snake bites and diseases, and loss of possessions; their angry writhings and gyrations is believed to bring destruction like the collapse of homes and buildings in the same way that water in the form of floods and landslides can cause great damage to life, homes and crops of the people. Some residents in Bungamati also said that on Naga Panchami day, farmers also pray to the nagas to control the rainfall as too much rain can be destructive to crops and property.

Beside the legendary or calendrical festivities related to rain, the various Newar villages and localities have their own special places to pray for rain in times of drought. The Bungamati villagers offer prayers at the Machhendranath temple during drought but a special tantric ritual is performed at the Kotwal Daha where Astamatrika is propitiated with the sacrifice of a buffalo that is distributed as prasad to the villagers. A buffalo is also sacrificed at Hayagriwa Bhairav temple in the Machhendranath temple square. I was told that every five or six years, the village suffers from drought due to irregularity of monsoon rain, and when such a worship is performed at Kotwal Daha, they have always received rain. While the Bungamati villagers go to Kotwal Daha for the rain ritual, residents from Kirtipur come to Bungamati to offer ritual worship asking for rain in Machhendranath Bahal. Worship and ritual for rain is performed in front of the Machhendranath temple where there is a rectangular shrine, which is supposed to contain the sacred waters of the seven seas and oceans (some say that it contains the holy waters of all the renowned tirthas). The Bungamati residents believe that if one prays and circumambulates the rectangular shrine, they have circumambulated all the renowned tirthas. While Kirtipur Newars come to Bungamati to ask for rain, the Patan Newars go to Godavari to ask for the same.
Plate 12. The Rectangular place of worship. A place believed to contain the water of seven seas. Paying a pilgrimage to this place is supposed to be equivalent to visiting of all pilgrimages. Newars from various parts of the valley also come and pray for rain at this place.

10.4 Tirthas And The Sacred Rivers

Another “station” in the natural trajectory of water is the underground flows, which in the Hindu/Buddhist religions in Nepal, is taken as a kind of conceptual model connecting renowned *tirthas* through imagined underground streams in which their waters are mingled with water of the great holy rivers and streams. The sacredness of the water is thus crystallized in the many *tirthas* (places of holy pilgrimages) preferably located near water -- the riverbanks, or the confluence of rivers and streams (*dohhano, Veni*), lakes, pools, wells, springs and fountains. The most sacred rivers in the valley are Bagnati and Vishnumati, the tributaries of the holy *Ganges* River. In Hinduism, the sacred Ganges is believed to have issued from the foot of Vishnu and thus the name Vishnumati. Another holy river, Keshavati (also part of holy *Ganges*) originates from the matted hair of Siva. It is believed that when *Ganga* flowed with a turbulent force, the matted hair of Siva stopped the force of the flow that would have caused destruction, and by let the gentle river Keshavati flow from it. These rivers play an important role in the religious life of Newars and Nepalese as a whole. The “lifeworld” of the people of Bungamati is constituted by their awareness of these *tirthas* and the time they devote to worship at *tirthas* far away from where they actually live.
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The famous Buddhist pilgrimage *Lakha Tirtha* is also situated on the banks of Vishnumati.

The purifying aspect of water by bathing in the sacred water of various *tirthas* is the most compelling religious activity of the Newars. *Tirthas* are usually associated with gods or goddesses and vary widely in the prestige and purpose for which they are visited. Some are visited for acquiring cure, others for good fortune, still others for absolution from *pap* (sin), and the rest are either visited by pilgrims seeking off-spring and or for simply receiving blessings from the presiding deity. Most sacred rivers like Bagmati, Vishnumati, Keshavati, and the streams Manohara and Hanumante in the valley are endowed with celebrated *tirthas*.

Besides the river *tirthas*, there are springs, pools, and fountains, tanks and reservoirs, which are renowned *tirthas*. Many of these are found in the valley itself. Some lie in the distant mountain range like *Muktinath*, (a Siva *tirtha*) where bathing is meritorious. There are 108 *makara spouts* (carved figure of the mythical sea animal ‘makara’ on the water spouts) from which the water pours forth purifying the pilgrim when bathing in it.

The other celebrated *tirtha* is a pool of Siva known as *Gosaikunda*, chain of sacred lakes almost at the ultimate source of river Trisuli. This *tirtha* is about several days’ climb at the north of the valley. It is believed that the lake is sanctified by Siva’s passage when he rested there for thousands of years after he had consumed the deadly poison to protect his fellow gods (*devas*). To the Nepalese, this *tirtha* is a highly esteemed one. Bathing in its water is the highest merit that most Nepalese covet.

Pilgrimage is made according to one’s own desires and time and dictates of season though in most cases it is an annual affair at the prescribed time of the lunar calendar. Thus *Janai Purne* or the full moon day of August, many bathe in *Gosaikunda*. This is a day when the high-*jat* Hindus change their sacred threads and the others are given the protective thread round their wrists by the family priests. *Gosaikunda* is however, too far for the holy dip for many people in the valley. Thus for those unable to go to *Gosaikunda*, there is *Kumbhesvara Tirtha* in Patan where the pilgrims go for the holy bath on *Janai Purne* day. It is believed the water from the far off *Gosaikunda* through an imagined underground stream flows into *Kumbhesvara* and therefore the water in this pool is just as sacred as that of *Gosaikunda*. The Patan *Sivalinga* is known as
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*Kumbhesvara* (Lord of the Water Pot). This name is believed to have derived from the *linga’s* origin as it appeared to Sarbapadacharya from a jar of water (*purna kalasa*) when he was worshipping (Wright, 1966). Some Newars (mostly males) in Bungamati who can afford to go to *Gosaikunda* on this day visit this *tirtha* both for pilgrimage and as an outing; *Kumbhesvara pokhari* is more preferred by the people because of its location being within an easy reach.

On the eve of the last day of the calendar, people go on a pilgrimage in great numbers to *Sapana Tirtha* (the holy place of dreams), whose waters cure ailments of the skin and bring hope for a new and better life to pious bathers. There is a tale attached to this *tirtha*. A leper had a dream in which he was told to bathe in a stream just outside his village (Tokha); he did so and his skin was healed. Thus the pond near this stream got its name, *Sapana Tirtha*. The holy bathing and gifts for the gods at *Sapana Tirtha* bring to a close the festivals of the old year while ushering the new and a hope that one’s dreams may come true.

*Mata Tirtha Kunda* is visited on Mother’s day. Purifying bathing is performed in the larger-pool and a dead mother's face is reflected in the smaller pool. Here we can see how water is connected to people’s lives as the reflective power to show the face of someone they loved and has left the earth.

As Slusser (1982) writes: “in water cosmography, all of the *tirthas* are conceived as linked by way of a vast network of channels, terrestrial, celestial, and mystic. In this way not only are the Valley’s various waters interconnected, but they join the most sacred waters of India”. It must be for this reason that some *tirthas* like those at the confluence of famous rivers are more renowned like the *Indriani Tirtha* at the confluence of two affluents, SunKosi and the five river *tirthas* (*pancanadi-nari*), which are at the confluence of the Bagmati and Vishnumati. The holy bathing at the *Baisedhara* (22 water spouts) in Balaju on the full moon day of *Chaitra* (April), is regarded as the most auspicious of all days because on this day these waters are miraculously connected to the sacred waters of the Trisuli River which flow to the west of the valley. Buddhists believe this full moon is sacred to lord Buddha and to the souls of their dead. It is thought that it was on this day that the first human Buddha “Bipaswi” sowed the lotus seed which when
it bloomed on the water’s surface, sent forth the holy flame called Swayambhu, the Self Existent one.

_Tirthas_ and worship is part of the dharma of the social individual though it is not possible for people to pay homage to all the holy rivers and lakes. However, the natural trajectory of water (underground movement) is acknowledged as a force, which can move water from one station to another. Thus _tirthas_ at the confluence of two or three rivers are more renowned because of the mingling caused by the natural trajectory of waters from two or more holy rivers.

It is not always that the mingling of the holy waters of various _tirthas_ turn out to be more auspicious and more sacred, or earn a higher reputation; there is the other dimension of water, the dark side that can also be experienced in such a mingling. Rani Pokhari built just outside the Kathmandu city gates is one such example. Pratapmalla brought water via canals and containers from fifty-one of the most revered _tirthas_ of Nepal and India (Clark 1957). Despite the intermingling of such sacred waters, the pond could not make a good repute; it became a place for humans committing suicide. People believe it to be haunted by ghosts and in general shun it.

Today, _tirthas_ mean more than mere earning of piety, following tradition, asking and praying for a boon; it also has a recreational aspect. Among the older people, it is a religious act of earning merit for the next life or asking for a success and prosperity of family members. For younger generations, it not only fulfils their internal wishes by making pilgrimages or earning piety but also acts as an outing activity with one’s peer group; an adventure and recreation. In Bungamati, I found youths forming a group and going on a pilgrimage; sometimes it is two or three household members getting together to have a combination of outing as well as accomplishment of the devotional aspect of their life. _Tirthas_ today are a mixture of religious piety and social entertainment. Although bathing in the holy waters is highly regarded in the socio-religious lives of Newars, the present condition of some of the rivers and pools have made changes in the attitude of the people. The holy Bagmati is so polluted that some people think twice about taking a dip for purification and penance. Even some of the older people in Bungamati are skeptical about the purifying aspect of the holy rivers today. Pollution is the biggest problem facing most rivers and streams in the valley. Some people in the village
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informed me that the waters of the sacred rivers and pools are always pure even if they may look dirty. However, even those who say so, seem to feel differently when they have to bathe in the not polluted tirtha water. For instance, a villager who had gone to Mata Tirtha Kunda for pilgrimage said that he had a dip in the holy waters of the kunda (natural pool) but he also washed himself in the tap water after the dip. This was the same person who told me that even though the tirtha waters look dirty it is not so because it is always pure as it is connected with gods and goddesses. With the pollution of these holy rivers there is a definite decline in the usage of the holy river water for sacred baths. Today, most of the renowned tirthas have remained so only in name.

10.5 The Water Of Death And The Burning Ghats

Water is linked to people not only when alive, because the communion with water is not broken even in death. The dying and dead are bathed in it. Many wish to draw their last breath by the riverside preferably at the Pushupati ghats and immersed in the holy waters of Bagmati. In Bungamati, people either die at home or at the hospital. Those who die in the hospital are brought home in most cases to perform certain rites before being taken to the cremation ground. The dead body is always kept on the ground floor of the house, which is considered as the outside, and can therefore be used to keep dead body (considered polluted). Water is not only offered from the river to the dead (lah ton kegu) at the cremation ground by phuki members, but it is also offered during the last hour of death at home if death occurs at home. A continuous flow of water is poured over the feet of the dying man, usually done by the chief mourner (either the eldest son or the dying man’s wife). Nilah (unpolluted water) is poured from Kolla (brass vessel) until the moment the person dies and the Ghate Baidya (traditional physician) pronounces the person dead. The cremation grounds (ghats) are mostly by the riverside with a temple nearby.

After the cremation, the ash is swept into the river to reintegrate with the vast circulating network of earthly and celestial waters. However, the communion with water does not end with the reintegration into earthly and celestial waters. The rituals performed for the dead shows the continuous link with water. Twelve Sraddhas (death rituals) are performed during the first one-year period, at the twelve different confluences of the
rivers in the Valley -- Sankhamool, Lakha Tirtha, Theku-dwan, Guheshwari, Rajtirtha, Swa-Bhagwati Nakhu, Gokarna etc.

Plate 13. The burning ghats by the banks of the river

After the first twelve sraddha rites are over, sraddha is performed once annually to all the dead ancestors (pitrī). The “Gau dan” (an offering of cow to the dead) ritual is performed because it is believed the dead have to cross the river when entering the different world and makes it easier for the dead to hold on to the cow’s tail and cross this river (Baitadi). In the sraddha rites, offering water to the dead ancestors or forefathers is called Priti Tarpana. This is one of the prominent sraddha rites and is performed after the holy bath in the holy river (Bagmati, Vishnumati, Keshavati or others). The translation of two hymns from Garuda Purana (text used for death rituals) as presented by Dr.B. Ghimere (1998) are as follows:

“May the entire universe comprising all worlds of gods, seers and men--as also all forefathers, including those on the mother’s side be happy.

Those that are friends, related and those not related (in the present life), as also those who were related in other lives-let all of those now desirous of this water -- offering be happy eternally!
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May all those belonging to innumerable past generations who once dwelt in the seven continents, be happy in their three worlds (heaven, sky and earth) with this water offered by me!”

The offering of water to the dead is commonly practiced among both Newars and non-Newars in Nepal. Besides the sraddha rites, water is also offered in the name of the dead when one dreams of dead person (relatives, friends) to request their atma to rest in peace.

Water continually features in the life of the dead in the various rituals performed by the living for pacifying the spirit or for helping the dead to rest in peace.

The Burning ghats connected with the town of Kathmandu are located on Bagmati’s banks. The ghats provide access to river water for religious purposes. They are constructed of stone and bricks, transforming the riverbanks into a wide flight of stairs that provide safe and easy access to the water's edge. The ghats facilitate both the everyday use of the river water and ritual bathing (an important prelude to most religious observances), and provides the dying humans the preferred last resting place to await death in the laps of water, bathe in its water if possible, and after death, reintegrate as ash, with the cosmic stream. However, every river in the valley does not have ghats; people use the riverbanks for cremation, rituals and other mundane activities. The most important and biggest ghat is the Pashupatinath ghat on the Bagmati river, in Kathmandu (See Plate 21). Most people prefer to be taken to Pasupatinath ghat for their cremation, as well as to draw their last breath by the Bagmati river, and let their ashes be reintegrated through the holy Bagmati. Those receiving state-level funeral are cremated there as well. Thus the steps of the ghats are interrupted regularly with large masonry platforms, usually circular, known as masan for the purpose of cremating the dead.

Bungamati residents cremate their dead on the banks of Bagmati river. This ghat has the Vishnu Devi temple, a common feature of the burning ghats. It is situated at about a 45 minutes’ walk, southeast of Bungamati. There are two cremation grounds: one for Sakyas, Vajracharyas and Tuladhars, and the other is for the other lower jats.
11 MAN-MADE MODIFICATIONS OF THE NATURAL TRAJECTORIES OF WATER.

Water sources and structures related to the storage, distribution and access to water like springs, wells, ponds, natural pools, rivers, streams, riverside ghats, are found in every nook and corner of the valley; they are an important part of the Cultural landscape of Kathmandu. The architectural and engineering works of these water-related constructions create individually attractive monuments, providing not only utilitarian functions, but also beauty and art blending with the old palaces, temples, shrines, stupas, viharas and houses in the valley. The trajectories of water are also products of the interplay between processes in nature and processes in social life. The ways water flows from its “stations” in nature to final “stations” of consumptions are increasingly being influenced by human decisions to invest in waterworks. Such decisions have been influenced by considerations of different kinds, ranging from political control and economic rewards, to religious merits. The actors behind these more social trajectories of water have varied from kings, to temple associations, to local communities or individuals.

In the old Kathmandu kingdoms, providing access to water was thought to be especially meritorious for the donor. In Kathmandu valley, we find that century after century of such constructions by kings and commoners have left no corner of the valley without liberal number of water sources. Most of those built in the past have fallen to ruin, but the work of providing water has been going on in new ways, new systems, and sometimes the old forgotten water sources have come to use in dire needs.

There are reservoirs, wells or running fountains to provide water to the people in the valley. The large reservoirs known as pokhari or in Newari phuku are brick-lined tanks surrounded by continuous ghat-like steps for safe access, and sometimes protected by low walls. They are conveniently located everywhere in towns, villages, and localities. The kings donated a number of these reservoirs around the city. Reservoirs are also found in palace compounds; some are large like the Patan Bhadrakhal, others are smaller and associated with the nearby fountain of running water. According to an old Maharjan from Patan, some pokharis are made of the ground water, while others have to be filled by channeling water from another source like spring, or fountain of flowing water.
Dahas are also commonly found in the valley. They are natural reservoirs (found widespread in the towns, villages or their outskirts), hollow places into which flowing water is collected.

Tutidhara in Nepali or Jahruh in Newari is a stone trough, elevated on a masonry support or into a wall or the side of a fountain. It holds a few gallons of water and is replenished by a funnel arrangement in the rear and furnished with one or more stoppered spigots. One could unstop the spigot at will and drink directly from beneath it just like the traditional way of drinking from the spouted vessel overhead. These were in use from the time of Lichhavis until recently and were established at temples, tirthas, in the streets and squares and often near a well or fountain to facilitate refilling them, most probably as meritorious acts of providing drinking water to travelers, pilgrims or pujaris (worshippers at temples). Today they are not much in use and most of them are in ruins.

Another characteristic water source in the valley is inara (Tuu tunthi in Newari). They are deep, circular wells lined with bricks from which water is drawn by hands. Most villages and localities have public inara. Today, individuals have started making inara for individual household use if feasible and possible in the face of growing water shortage in the valley.

The most coveted and distinctive water source in the valley is the deep fountain known as gaihridhara in Nepali (gahiti in Newari). It is a terraced pit, where the fountain is terraced in diminishing stages, each bricked and paved, and traversed by one or more stairways. These fountains are fed by the gravity flow through underground clay pipes; one or more spouts emerge from the lowermost retaining wall, and drains are provided to carry away the overflow. In some places the overflow of water from these fountains is used for irrigation purposes like in Dhobighat, Jawlakhel.

Below the fountain lies agricultural fields to which the water is channeled. Very large fountains have complex forms like the immense Sundhara adjacent to Bhimsen’s tower. As Slusser (1982:1) writes: “they are, infact, conceived as cosmic diagrams, the ubiquitous mandala, and even the underground clay pipes may be arranged accordingly”.

According to Auer and Gutschow (1974:39), a Bhaktapur acquaintance once affirmed that he had witnessed repairs to a fountain whose only underground source was a manuscript tantra”.

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Plate 14. Kumbhesvara Hiti, with carved stone spouts and a siva linga in the middle of the hiti.

Some of these fountains are not merely water sources for mundane use but are also important as tirthas. These fountains are provided with numerous spouts to accommodate large crowds. Some of the famous such tirthas ones are in Balaju (Baisedhara); in Godavari, and in Muktinath, a tirtha high on the Annapurna range.

Plate 15. Balaju Baisedahara tirtha with a carved makara stone spout.

Kundas form other water sources in the valley. They are natural pools found mostly near the sloping periphery of the Valley, where springs feed them. They are important as
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tirthas and attract large number of Nepalese for ritual bathing. These natural pools are contained in tank-like structures, with steps provided for safe entry.

The spouts through which water is issued are mostly made of stone (dhungedhara: Nepali; lohiti: Newari) There are few made of metal (sundhara, lumhiti). Most people refer to these fountains as dhungedhara. They are carved and cast in forms of symbolic creatures of water. Makara (a mythical water dragon) is the most common carving in these spouts. The carving is an open body of makara through which water flows. Some carvings are simple, some are elaborate with variety of creatures and things associated with water.

These water sources are also culturally important in many ways. They have always served as social centers, more so in the earlier days. People have gathered here not only for water but also for social interaction. The inscriptions preserved within them shows that they were the places where proclamations concerning the community were made public (Slusser 1982:1,156).

Because water is conceptualized as a sacred substance, water sources in the valley are filled with sacred images. Even the smallest of dhungedahara have one or two sacred images like sivalinga or chaitya associated with it. Some gairidharas have several major and minor stone sculptures like the one adjacent to Kumbhesvara temple.

Although these man-made water sources are clothed in a symbolic garb they obviously serve the very important practical function of providing water for drinking and washing. Today, the institutional frameworks through which they were constructed and maintained have changed dramatically, and many of them are falling into disuse and deteriorated.

11.1 The Modern State Managed Water Supply

The modern water supply to the valley is mainly through pipes, channeling water from the reservoirs at various points in the valley. Some areas are served by the Sivapuri reservoir while others by Pharphing reservoir. In some areas, pipes have been used to channel the water of springs to the villages and localities around it. Such supply of water has made life much easier as most town and city dwellers can have water pipes connected to their own houses and need not go to gairidhara or dhungedhara for water. In the
villages around the valley, water taps are provided so people have access to water at public water taps.

Due to the new system of water supply, people no longer attach much importance to the old water sources. It is much easier getting water from the tap. Over the years most of these water sources constructed by our ancestors have been neglected, and people have carelessly disregarded their importance. The wells and fountains are not cleaned nor cared for; most of them lie buried under the wild vegetation growth, broken down, and forgotten; at times, they are demolished for some other purposes. In this context an old farmer, Satyalal Maharjan from the village of Sanugau, Lalitpura (Paniko Purkhyuli Gian 2044 VS) voices his thoughts as follows:

*We and our ancestors as acts of dharma, dan and punya (goodness, gift and religious merit or virtue) constructed pokhari and inara. To be able to provide water to the needy is considered an act of dharma and punya. We, as farmers would look around in the field to find some water source so we could construct a well or pokhari in the field providing water to the thirsty farmers in their course of daily work. It was the tradition of our village that whoever bore the expense of constructing a pokhari or inara in the locality, would first offer the water to Nagkunda in Godavari. It was believed that after such an offer, sat (goodness and truth) would remain in the pokhari. All the village people would contribute labour whenever needed, would work together to keep these water sources clean and running. The inara or the pokhari would be named after the person who constructed them. We believe that there is god in these water sources. In this village we have inara that is renowned for its healing quality, as a cure for “galagath” (goitre). If a person suffering from such a disease continuously drank water from this inar for seven days, first thing in the morning, he would get cured. Previously, people from Patan, Bhaktapur and Jawlakhel would come here to get the water from the inara. People still use the water from this inara even today. These inaras and pokharis are important to us. Today, however, peoples' attitudes have changed. They are not interested in dharma. They do not value these water sources, demolish them and use the space for something else. The youngsters demolish such pokharis and put up fences to make playground for themselves. If reprimanded, they reply by saying they do not need pokhari but they need a playground. It is no use
talking to youngsters today, they put us off by saying that old people just like to nag. Where is the point in talking about dharma and punya now? This must be partly due to the new water source “dhara” (water taps) provided by the State for which we have to pay tax.

Development and advancement have brought changes in the attitudes of people to traditional practice. The traditional water sources have taken a heavy toll. Changes in the way of life have contributed towards it as well. People have less time to manage the maintenance of the traditional sources. Most people are employed in offices and other institutions, which leave them with very little time to go around cleaning pokhari, inaras, etc. They cannot afford to give the time for the maintenance of the old water sources especially when they have an alternative source like the state-run water taps bringing water right into their very doors; unfortunately these taps are not doing a very satisfactory job of supplying water.

The new water supply is not able to provide the Valley population with sufficient drinking water. Shortage of water faced by the city of Kathmandu and Patan is unquestionably a huge problem, faced for over ten to twenty years as of now. Each year, the shortage gets worse than the previous year; despite numerous water sources, the valley population is facing acute shortage of water. Negligence of traditional sources of water is partly responsible for the shortage, besides population growth and other natural factors. Making the valley sufficient in water is the promise of every political party that comes to power. The most recent Prime Minister (Krishna Prasad Bhattarai) in his speech after being elected as the Prime Minister promised the completion of the expensive Melamchi Water Project eliminating the perennial water shortage. People in the valley are eagerly waiting for this to happen.

11.2 Commodification Of Water

With the increasing involvement of both government and private entrepreneurs in water supply, this substance is becoming increasingly commodified the further one moves along its trajectory “stations” towards “stations” close to the final user. Water is no longer synonymous with sacredness alone; it not only purifies, cleanses or quenches thirst, but has become a source for money. Water is cash today. Technological
development has enabled man to convert water-resource into another form of energy like electricity, which is sold to the people; the government earns revenue, and a whole new set of options is open to the people because of this technological advancement. Instead of using ghatta (water mills) for grinding grains, people can use machines run by electricity, saving precious time, and reducing physical labor.

Shortage of water for drinking and household use has brought out entrepreneurs who have started a lucrative business of selling water to the needy. Once upon a time, people would not have accepted this; giving water to the needy was the highest meritorious act of virtue, hence the many water sources constructed in the past. Selling water would be the most shameful act. Today, the situation has changed, and those willing to profit from this change have been successful. We have many state water tankers with khane pani (drinking water) written on them, going around selling water (it can cost anywhere from Rs.500-Rs.1000 per tank or more of water). Sometimes these tankers even take dirty water from rivers like the Nakhu river. The lower part of Nakhu river is dirty and muddy, especially in the dry seasons, but one can often see these tankers drawing water from this part of the river for supplying water to the public. Individuals having a motor vehicle which can carry around 700-1000 litre tanks have also started the water business charging around Rs.400 and above, depending on the distance it has to be transported to and amount of water.

Certain areas in the valley have better supply of water, meaning that the number of households using the water is less or have working dhungedhara as an extra source. In the locality where I live (within 3 km from Bungamati), water shortage is not a problem yet, although water supply has become relatively less to what it was ten years ago. Some people in this area have started the business of supplying water to the needy areas; these water entrepreneurs take water orders over the phone, and make the delivery during early mornings. In the last two years, they have been supplying water throughout the year, though the demand is less during the monsoon season.

Usage of Gairidharas and dhungedharas, which still have good amount of water, is no longer free for those who are not from the locality and bring water tanks to fill the water from the fountain. The entrepreneurs also get water from dhungedharas close by (paying
11.3 Legal Aspects Of Domestic Water Use

Most houses in the cities and towns have water pipes supplying water to individual houses for which a monthly tax is paid. The use of water from the old traditional sources was free while state-supplied water is taxed. The following is a brief summary of the water tax levied to the users by the state. Few places are however exempt from such a tax.

Pani Kar Ain (Water Tax Law) 2023 VS (Vikram Sambat)

Those connecting water pipes for drinking water have to pay water tax on monthly basis to the State water tax office.

a. The tax will start from the month that water pipe is connected to the individual’s house.

b. Tax can also be paid in advance for any number of months if one wishes to do so.

c. Fines for late payment of water tax will be as follows:
Fifteen days after the last date of payment: 10% of the tax. If paid within 30 days after exceeding the 15 days’ deadline: 20% of the principal sum has to be paid. After 30 days but within 3 months 50% of the principal sum is charged.

d. Any taxpayer who does not pay water tax within 6 months of the deadline as given in the clause 4 (3) of the drinking water tax, the state under clause 2, sub-clause (Ka) can stop the supply of water.

Places where water tax is not needed:

i. Inside the Palace.

ii. Government quarters, and offices.

iii. Public educational institutions, hospitals, libraries, orphanages, religious institutions, temples, public rest places (pati).
iv. Roadside water taps or those which are placed for public use.

v. Anyone registering the waterline in personal name, but used for public purpose.

vi. Those who try to avoid or trick the government with regards to not paying the tax will bear consequences of Rs. 1000 fine or 3 months’ jail or both.

Public water taps are widespread in the localities, towns and cities. During water shortage, numerous water vessels of every shape, size and colour can be seen lined up in front of these public water taps; sporadic quarrels and arguments occur in such places if someone tries to overtake another’s turn in filling water. Wealthy people buy water from either Khane Pani Sangsthan (Drinking Water Association) or private entrepreneurs. They fill their water tanks at home, which could last for a day or two or more depending upon the size of the family.

People do not use pokhari water for cooking and drinking. Some localities like Dhobighat in Jawlakhel have taken measures to control the waste of water from dhungedhara by regulating issue of water. During the day it is open for people’s use but at night it is closed.

Perennial shortage of water in the valley has compelled the people to look for alternatives. Renovating old water sources like fountains and wells have been one way some have tried to tackle the problem. Fountains are the most coveted water sources as the water is clean and tasty and regarded as unpolluted. Wells and old fountains are remembered and excavated to see if they are functioning. As Slusser (1982:1, 154) writes: “Occasionally, when the lack of water has been particularly severe- a perennial problem for Patan - old fountains are remembered, cleared, and rehabilitated. In the dry winter of 1971, for example, a buried fountain near Uku-bahal was excavated by the neighborhood people and found to be still functioning”.

Some people have also started constructing wells in their household compound if it is big enough to allow such a construction. The Nepali law for water resource does not restrict the use of underground water within one’s own property.
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Rivers have always been useful in times of water shortage for washing clothes, bathing, and other household purposes. Unfortunately, the rivers in the valley are in sad state these days. The water is polluted with man-made wastes; during the winter season the rivers are almost dry, and people go to rivers that still provide some water when other sources may be unavailable.

11.4 Bungamati Water Sources

Bungamati has both traditional water sources as well as new water system sources. There are about five to six public water taps in the 6 twas (wards), the major Newar settlement, and there are some individuals who have connected the water pipes to their houses.

The other water sources are ponds (pukhu: Newari; pokhari: Nepali). There are two pukhus just before the entrance to the ward no. 2 leading to the Machhendranath Temple. These two pukhus may have been constructed not only for utilitarian purpose but also probably as a symbolic sign (body of waters on two sides of entrance) of auspiciousness when Machhendranath was brought to Bungamati. The two pukhus stand on two sides just before the small pathway leading to the temple. People do not use these pukhus for any household purposes although they may have done so in the past when they solely depended on these traditional sources for water. There are three other pukhus believed to have been constructed by the people of Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan (Lalitpur) when they settled in Bungamati to take care of Machhendranath. They are called Dev pukhu, Kha pukhu and Na pukhu. These ponds are not really used for drinking water but are usually used for ritual purposes. According to the residents in Bungamati, Dev pukhu is used by wards 1, 2 and 3 (mostly, Sakya and Tuladhar settlement), for the purification rituals of pollution associated with death, and also for other purification rituals of life-cycle rites. The other three wards 4, 5 and 6, use Na pukhu according to the villagers.

Kha pukhu has almost disappeared; the village Adhyaksa (village chief) said that they should try and salvage this pukhu as it is part of Bungamati's cultural history. Kha actually meant pokhari (pond) in the old Newari language according to some of the residents in Bungamati. It is also believed that these pokharis were constructed for the three thars who came to reside in Bungamati -- Shresthas (from Bhaktapur), Sakyas
(from Kathmandu) and Jyapus (from Patan). When Bungamati had no water taps supplying water, these ponds were used for both domestic and religious purposes.

Plate 16. Pokhari/Pukhu in ward no 2. used mostly for death purification rituals by the three wards (1, 2, 3)

Besides the pokhari, there are two or three wells (tuu/inara); water from one of these wells known as nhawan gha is also used for bathing Machhendranath during the bathing ceremony. Villagers also use water from this inara for washing clothes and bathing even today. Water from inara is regarded as pure and sacred (nilah in Newari, jal or Ganga ja in Sanskrit/Nepali) like the holy river waters. Whenever this inara water is needed for ritual ceremonies like the bathing ceremony of Machhendranath, it is closed for the domestic use for about 15 days to avoid pollution. The other well is mostly used by the Panejus for the purpose of worship and also bathing in the past. Recently the trend of using this well water has diminished since it is easier to use tap water. The water from the well gets too cold in winter and the older priests (some of them around the age of 80) find it difficult to draw the water from the well as the water should not be touched by anyone.

So though the water from the taps is not traditionally or religiously regarded as sacred (nilah/ganga jal), the easier access of water taps for bathing especially for the older priests has become a practical choice. There is a proverb in Newari “Alsi misaya ghale Ganga akhu(n) tirtha Namo”. The proverb means that a lazy woman uses ordinary water as Ganga jal by excusing her laziness with the saying that if we think of the ordinary water as Ganga jal in our heart it becomes Ganga jal. The priests feel the same. The
special well water is regarded as pure and holy, but practically it is easier to use tap water; as long as they think of it as the holy water and not allow anyone near them while taking the bath, tap water can also be as pure and holy. It is all in one’s mind and heart. There is also a dhungedara (a fountain with stone spout) in the Machhendranath Bahal (the temple compound). The water is used for drinking and cooking purposes as well as “nilah” for worship. There is just one dhara (spout) from which water is issued.

Plate 17. Inara from which water is supposed to be used for bathing Machhendranath

There is also a kunda (natural pool) near Karya Binayak (Ganesh temple in the village), but it has almost disappeared in the thick vegetation and trees around that area and there is very little water. In the days of Rana rule this kunda water was used as nilah because the water collected in this kunda from the kulo (irrigation canal) passed Machhendranath temple and touched the deity’s feet on its course, and is regarded as sacred.

Bungamati has Nakhu and Bagmati rivers as water sources for utilitarian and ritual purposes. Although there are public water taps, wells and ponds, Nakhu River is used by the residents for domestic purposes like washing clothes, bathing especially during Mohini festival when there is much washing and cleaning to do.
Plate 18. Nakhu River where the villagers are washing clothes and bathing after their work in the khet

Public taps alone cannot fulfill the needs of all the residents of the six wards to accomplish the task around the same time. Moreover, water in the taps do not run the whole day and night; there are only certain hours in the day when taps have running water. The village does not suffer from water shortage except for wards 8 and 9. Ward no. 9 has more severe problem because of the lack of sufficient water for household use from the state water supply. Some disputes and arguments occur due to the problem between wards 8 and 9 because they receive water from the same line of pipes. These disputes are usually solved at the village level by the VDC officials like the adakchya (chief) and upa-adakchya (assistant chief). The VDC officials are trying to solve this problem but it has not been easy; they hope to do so in near future.

11.5 Agricultural Production And Water Trajectories

The valley depends mostly on rain for cultivation. However, during the dry winter season, rice-planting season, and in case of late monsoon rain, traditional man-made irrigation canals known as “kulo” are used for supplying of water to the fields. The water sources for these kulos are either rivers, springs or fountains. When labour is invested in such construction works the water flowing in them are not a common resource any longer, rights of use has been attached to it. Water has become a resource under management.

The management of these kulos vary according to the rules and system of the locality, village, town, and user members. In some areas, those farmers having fields irrigated by a
particular \textit{kulo} form a committee known as the \textit{Upabhokta} (User group) \textit{committee}. There are elected members with responsibilities of managing, maintaining and running of the \textit{kulo}, as is the case in Bungamati. In some areas like Patan, the households of a \textit{twa} (ward) is assigned certain duties, so each \textit{twa} has the responsibility of managing the running of \textit{kulos} in turns. In Pulchowk the \textit{si guthi} (death association) members occasionally or whenever required, contribute labour for the maintenance of the \textit{kulo}. The use of water resources for agriculture, household purposes, and production of electricity, are governed by state laws.

\textbf{11.5.1 Legal Aspects of Irrigation}

I would like to give a brief account on the law governing the use of water resources in the country especially those affecting the use of water for irrigation system because the farming communities are more involved in the use of water resource for irrigation purposes rather than industrial enterprises.

There are number of laws governing the use of water resources in the country. Water resource refers to all forms of surface and underground water or any form or state of water resource present in the land. The law \textit{“Jalsrot Ain”} (Water Resource Code of Law) V.S. 2049 is so passed by His Majesty’s government for the conservation, suitable utilization, industrial purposes, development and beneficial use of water resources as well as for the protection against environmental degradation.

I shall mention some which may apply to the use of water by the people for agricultural and private use.

i. Use of Water Resource: No one can use the water resource without a letter of permission from the concerned authority.

This law, however does not apply under following conditions:

a. For personal or public use of drinking and domestic use.

b. For personal or public use of water resource for irrigation in one’s own land.

c. Use of water resource for cottage industry like running water mills.

d. Use of boat as a means of transport for personal use.
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e. Use of water resources, which lies within the area of land owned by a person.

ii. Person or Organization using water resources should do so with no harmful repercussions on others and should be for best possible use of the resource.

iii. Provision for the formation of user group Committee: A committee or association is permitted to form by those who would wish to utilize water resource for the benefit of public.

iv. Primary enterprises for the use of Water Resource: The use of resource should generally be according to the primary degree of need for use:
   a. Drinking water and domestic use
   b. Irrigation
   c. Farming enterprises like animal husbandry and fisheries
   d. Hydro-electric power
   e. Cottage industry
   f. Water transport
   g. Other uses

v. Use of water resource for hydroelectric power: Water resource can be used for such a purpose by companies or organizations on the permission granted from the authority concerned. The rules and regulations of the concerned authority are applicable in granting of permission.

vi. Use of the water resource or any developmental work by His Majesty’s government: No restriction is imposed on use of water resource or any kind of developmental work organized by His Majesty's government. Under this law, any organization or His Majesty’s government is permitted to use any land or building connected with the particular water resource project for public service. There is a stipulation that the government provides compensation for the use of such land and building according to the estimation of the government.

vii. Private properties like land and buildings can be trespassed in the course of survey of water resource or utilization of water resource by the government workers, companies or organization who possess the letter of permit with prior notice to the individuals concerned. In case of any liability caused to the property, compensation
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should be offered according to the estimation of the government or organization possessing the permit. However, prior notice may not be needed to enter private property in circumstances like accidents, when rescue is needed, when the use or misuse of water resources by the private house causes problems to public property like roads and when investigation is needed.

viii. Detrimental effect on Environment: While using water resources, floods, landslides and other detrimental effect on the environment should be avoided.

I have covered only some of the main points of the law governing the use of water resource, which individuals need to know when using water resources.

Under the heading “cultivated land” in *Muluki Ain* (Code of Law 2055 V.S.) there are some laws that define the rights in the use of water resource for irrigation purpose:

i. According to the law, if a landowner or farmer has self-financed the building of *kulo* (either by employing labourers or using one’s own labour) he has the right to use water from the *kulo* before others. In situations where the users of *kulo* (irrigation canal) have no committee to divide the use of water for cultivation, the law gives the right to use water to those farmers whose land is at the source of the *kulo* first, then those next to the source and so on. In cases where the cultivator at the source of the *kulo* is somehow unable to use the water in the allotted time, the farmer whose field is situated on the lower side of the source, uses the water. Once all the farmers at the lower levels have completed planted, the water is then made available to the farmer at the source.

ii. When one wants to make a new *kulo* above the already existing one, permission will be granted only if the new *kulo* does not affect the supply of water to the already existing *kulo*, and does not affect the cultivation. If the *kulo* is damaged or the overflow of water erodes the land, it will be the responsibility of the tenants to supply one’s own labour or hired labour for repair and maintenance of the *kulo*. If the damage is too great for the tenants to repair, the responsibility falls on the landowners to make an appeal to the government for help by giving the estimate of damage and the financial help needed. Such an application has to be put forth to the
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cconcerned office of His majesty’s government and any help extended should be used solely for the repair of the kulo.

iii. There is also a law that prevents the establishment of irrigation scheme if such a scheme is jeopardizing the safety of the land or village, for instance causing of landslides, floods, etc.

Problems concerning the use of water resources are usually solved at the V.D.C. level by the village chief and members of the village council. According to the lawyer I talked to, only few cases relating to the use of water resources reach the Supreme Court. Cases reaching such level could be politically motivated. Water related problems at the village or district level are in common related to irrigation, drinking and domestic use. Sometimes the irrigation canal (kulo) is blocked due to construction of buildings or walls without leaving the outlet for the kulo that might adversely affect the others. In Bungamati there was a case filed which reached the Lalitpur District Court. The following is a brief summary of the case and its outcome.

**A case filed at the Lalitpur District Court by a resident of ward no. 5 in Bungamati:**

This case relates to the obstruction of the kulo by one of the villagers who built a concrete wall obstructing the course of the canal. Quarrel arose between the two Maharjan residents of ward no.5 who both had agricultural fields close one another. Mr. Mahila Maharjan's field is above the field of Mr.Hera Lal Maharjan. The irrigation channel flowed through the edge of both their lands and coursed down to the pokhari from which it flowed out to irrigate several other fields. However, in 2051V.S(1995, June-July) Mr. Mahila Maharjan built a concrete wall closing the irrigation channel. Mr. Hera Lal Maharjan went to him and requested him to leave space for the course of irrigation canal since it was public property and that he therefore should not construct the wall. Mr. Mahila Maharjan was arrogant and said it was his land so he could do what he wanted. A quarrel broke out between the two families; Hera Lal’s household tried to break the wall constructed in the path of the irrigation canal, while Mr. Mahila Maharjan’s household threw stones at Hera Lal’s house breaking some windows and hurting a passerby. The police came to intervene and arrested those who were involved. Mr. Mahila’s son, Bhai Maharjan, filed a case against Hera Lal Maharjan’s family for breaking their wall. He
demanded that he should be compensated for the damage caused. He appealed to the court stating that the other party should be fined Rs.3000/-, an estimated cost for reconstruction of the wall; he also requested that they be punished for damaging his property.

Hera Lal Maharjan’s son, Durga Lal Maharjan, put forth his own appeal by pointing out that the law of the country allowed no individual to obstruct public property like the kulo. Water Resource law of 2049 V.S., Section 16(1), states that private property can be used when in need for the purpose of irrigation, construction of dams and pokhari. In this case, the irrigation canal was already there.

This case was filed in the year 2051 V.S. (1990); a year later, the two families somehow reconciled their differences. The family of Mahila Maharjan agreed to leave the required space for the kulo while constructing the wall and compensate for the damage caused to Hera Lal’s house. Thus the case closed with compromises made by Mr. Mahila Maharjan’s family.

Such legal battles in the use of water resources, is not common in the valley. The problems concerning use of water mainly occurs during rice plantation as I found in Bungamati. The period for reaching a verdict in the court after filing a case is about 2 years. Thus filing a case in such a situation is not practical because the rice-planting season is just two months.

11.5.2 The Social Life Of Water In Agricultural Production

Whether cultivation is irrigated or not, water when absorbed in cultivated plants has entered a social “station” in the sense that people have rights in cultivated plants. Appadurai has stated: “It is only through the analysis of these trajectories that we can interpret the human transactions and calculations that enliven things” (Appadurai 1986: 3). In order to understand the transactions and calculations at this “station” we have to look at rules, which affect agricultural decision-making.
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11.5.3 Land Tenure

The most important factor in this field is the land tenure rules. The 1957 Land Act for the first time conferred on registered holders of *Raikar* lands\(^{26}\) the status of “Landowners”. It also for the first time gave legal recognition to the right of the registered landholder to appropriate rents from the actual cultivators (M.C.Regmi, 1978). Previous to this act, the registered holders were merely tenants and known as *Mohi* but with the new development, the registered holders are known as ‘jaggawala’ and the actual cultivators are “Mohi”. The property rights gave the landowners right to sell, mortgage, and rent the land, which led to the emergence of multi-tiered land tenure structure. The non-working intermediary landowner occupied a position between the state and the actual cultivator. Landownership became divorced from the obligation to actually cultivate the land or contribute towards farm management and investment. The landowners paid tax to the state and collected rent from the tenants. The consequence of this led to exploitation of the actual cultivators by the landowners through exorbitant rents, insecurity of cultivators’ tenure. Tenurial provisions of the 1964 Lands Act, prohibits landowners from appropriating rents in excess of half the annual yield of the land. In Kathmandu Valley, however, specific rates have been prescribed, ranging from 8.62 *pathis* to 23 *pathis*\(^{27}\) grain per *ropanis* from the main annual crop. The Act\(^{28}\) defines the main annual crop as the crop which has the highest yield among all crops grown on any land throughout the year. According to this Act, the tenancy right will accrue to the husband, wife or son after the tenant’s death, “whomsoever the landowner trusts”. Since the act does not prescribe the course of action to be taken in case the landowner finds none of them trustworthy, tenancy rights are in effect inheritable subject only to the landlord’s evaluation of the personal character of the prospective successor. On failure to pay rent, or poor yield, or discontinuation of cultivation, for a period exceeding a year, except in dire circumstances, are reasons through which tenants can be evicted. The 1959 amendment to the 1957 Land Act had made tenancy rights alienable through sale, gift or donation.

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\(^{26}\) *Raikar* refers to land on which taxes are payable to the government, the state retaining the ownership.

\(^{27}\) Local measurement of weight: 20 *pathis* =1 *muri* = 80/85 Kg of grain.

\(^{28}\) 1964 Lands Act, op. cit., Section 2(b) (Regmi 1978).
This 1964 Lands Act does not allow the tenant to cultivate more than 4 *bighas*\(^{29}\) in Tarai, 10 *ropanis* in Kathmandu valley and 20 *ropanis* elsewhere in the hill region. In comparison, an owner cultivator may cultivate a farm 62.5% larger. The tenants were also not entitled to compensation if they lost surplus land while the owners were entitled to it.

The 1964 Lands Act clearly showed the importance given to the landowners. As Regmi (1978) states, two forms of tenure can be observed on *Raikar* lands at present - large areas of *Raikar* lands personally cultivated by the owner, and other large areas of *Raikar* land cultivated on payment of rent by persons other than the registered owners.

The recent development in the Land Reform Legislation has made a significant change in the lives of the actual cultivators. While the 1964 Land Act laid emphasis on the importance of landowner and putting tenants in a vulnerable position, the new code of law has given the tenants (*Mohi*), more rights. The change in the code of law has given the tenants rights to retain the land cultivated, on signing a contract of tenancy with the landowner at the time of taking up tenancy. Under this contract called *Mohi Hak*, the landowner is not allowed to make any sale or gift of the land cultivated by the tenant. In case of the sale of such land, the tenant can file a case and inevitably win it. To have this right, however, both *Mohi* and the Landowner have to mutually initiate a documented agreement for use of land for cultivation describing the amount of produce the cultivator (*Mohi*) should give to the Landowner on yearly or half-yearly basis as is appropriate. On the basis of this agreement, when the landowner receives the *kut* (the agreed amount of agricultural product) he acknowledges the receipt by signing an appropriate document. The *Mohi* takes this document to the Land Reformation Department (*Bhumi Sudhar*), which issues him a Provisional Land Ownership Certificate. This certificate is then taken by the *Mohi* to the Land Revenue office (*Malpot*) that issues him a *Mohi* land ownership certificate (*Mohi Lalpurja*). Once the cultivator possesses the document, neither the landowner nor anyone else can challenge his right of ownership to that piece of land. If the landlord wants to sell the land he has to have *Mohi’s* consent.

Today, many Maharjans in the Kathmandu Valley have acquired land through this new tenure system. In Bungamati, almost the entire population is involved in agriculture.

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\(^{29}\) Land measurement—270x270 sq. ft approx.
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Some households have larger agricultural fields (exceeding six *ropanis*) while the others have smaller ones. In the wards 1 to 6 of Bungamati, about 70% of the households own some agricultural land and basically cultivate the fields themselves. In my random survey of 100 households from ward no.1 to 6, I found that all the households depended on other sources of income besides agriculture, for living. The survey as well as the documents of the irrigation committee showed that the average agricultural land owned by the household is around 2 ropanis. About 25% of the households owning land acquired it through the system of Mohi Hak and not as inherited property. There are still some villagers cultivating as tenants with the Mohi Hak contract. I found that beside Maharjans, other *thar* like Tuladhars are also tenant cultivators in Bungamati.

11.5.4 A Case Study of a Tuladhar Tenant (Mohi) Cultivator in Bungamati

This is the case of a Tuladhar man’s family whose history of being tenant cultivators traces back to his grandfather’s time. He has a house of his own in the village and lives with his wife and two children (not with his parents); he owns a woodcraft business in addition to being a tenant cultivator. He pays 1/4 of what he produces in the land as *kut*, and invests some of the rest in seeds, fertilizers, and other essentials needed for agricultural production. It is only after three years of consecutive cultivation, that the tenant becomes eligible for the possession of half the land he has cultivated. He has been cultivating the land for more than three years, so he got the *Mohi Lalpurja* from the *Malpot* (Land Revenue) office. This means he is now in a position to either sell or built a house, or do what he likes with 1/2 of the land he is cultivating in without the consent of the owner. If the owner tries to sell the land, he can put a stop to it, a practice quite common in the valley recently. While the tenant cultivates and pays *kut* to the landowner, the landowner has to pay land tax to the *Malpot* depending on the kind of land he/she owns. If it is in the valley with irrigation facilities, then the tax is around Rs.75/- per *ropani* annually; for unirrigated fields, it is Rs 50/-, and for *Pakho* land it is Rs.25/-. The landlord is however in a position to terminate tenureship if the tenant has not cultivated for three consecutive years. It is therefore quite common that landlords like to change tenants after one or two years of tenureship.

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30 Agricultural fields on higher ground, which are not irrigated, and rice cannot be cultivated.

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The number of tenant cultivators are very less today. Due to Land Reforms giving tenants rights to own the land cultivated as well as the diminishing landholdings through division of property among the family members, have made most landowners in Bungamati as well as in other parts of the Valley, cultivate their own land using hired day-labourers.

11.5.5 The Irrigation “Station”

The irrigation system in the valley consists of both traditional water canals run by few individuals, and larger irrigation system sponsored by the State. In both cases, maintenance and management of the irrigation system known as kulos are the responsibility of the users.

In Bungamati and other areas of the valley we find many farmers who have small plots of land where cultivation can be managed without kulos. In many places, individual farmers are involved in making kulos individually without being part of an organization. They find a water source, say a spring or fountain close to their fields, and construct a canal to draw the water to the field. Regularly the canal is cleaned so that the flow of water is not obstructed.

In Bungamati there are three kulos that have been developed in the recent Irrigation Project of the State. These kulos are Bhorle Kulo, Dhanabu Kulo and Khokan Kulo. Among these kulos, Khokana Kulo serves just a small fraction of Bungamati farmers.

In the past, there was no special organization or association to take care of the kulos. Each individual farmer was responsible to see that his field has sufficient water supply. In Bungamati, villagers using a certain kulo, contribute labour for cleaning and repairing the kulo when needed. I will now proceed to give a brief account of how Dhanabu Kulo was run traditionally prior to it being categorized under the District Irrigation project. This kulo was originally called Ghatte Kulo; Ghatta is a water mill. Each village or town usually has a ghatta near a water source like the river where people would grind their paddy and the like. This ghatta is on the bank of Nakhu River although it is no longer in use today. The man who managed the water mill was the most likely person to be given the charge of managing water resource through kulos whenever needed because his mill was by the river- bank. He would be in charge of inspecting the kulos, letting water into various fields by turns. Since these kulos were not build with concrete material but just
the ground being dug and turned into canals, they were easily destroyed by heavy rain, grazing animals, and weeds and grasses disrupted the flow of the water. When any such repairs were needed, the mill man would send messages to the farmers about the problem. Those farmers using the kulo would have to contribute labour to maintain the kulo. Those who did not participate in the work had to pay fine of about Rs 80/-. The money collected as fine was used to buy food like flattened rice, meat, etc., to feed the working members. The mill man managed the overall maintenance. If the damage was not big, he would be in charge of the minor repairs and maintenance. In return for his work, he was paid in kind by the farmers. They paid him 1 pathi of rice, 2 pathi of wheat, paral (straw for his hut) and 1 pathi of potatoes in a year.

However, with the introduction of electricity, modern mills replaced the old mills. In Bungamati too, farmers started using modern mills run by electricity, which were easier and faster. This diminished the income of those running water mills. The man running the water mill had to soon give up his business as he could not earn his keep. This marked the end of Ghatte Kulo management that was running smoothly. Thus for a short period of transition from water mill to modern mill there was no one to take care of the kulos. Farmers would individually work to get the kulo working which did not work too well for there was no one to organize it. Finally the farmers using the ghatte kulo decided to form an association with elected members as managers in charge of the smooth running of the irrigation system.

Farmers in the village are still contributing their share of labour for maintenance of kulos, although management is no longer in the hands of a single person but in the hands of the elected member committee. Forming user group committee (Upabhokta Samitee) was advantageous when the District Irrigation Department started the project of financing already existing kulo systems as well as new ones under the Sector Project Development Program. The provision to form a “user committee” for the use of water resources provided in the Water Resource Law Code of V.S. 2049 made the farmers form a user committee in Bungamati to apply for finance to their already existing irrigation system.

In the village, farmers using two different kulos -- Bhorle and Dhanabu, applied for financial support from the District Irrigation Department.
A brief account on Dhanabu Kulo and how it is run under the new management followed by a description of Bhorle Kulo (which is a bigger *kulo* covering many areas beside Bungamati rice fields) is given below:

**Dhanabu Kulo**

There are about 40 farming members using this *kulo* to irrigate their paddy fields. Previously the man who ran the water mill managed the running of the *kulo* for which he was paid in kind as mentioned above. After the water mill stopped working the farmers formed an association of members who used the *kulo*. Eleven members were elected as officials in charge of various duties. They were the chief official and his assistant, treasurer, and others who would manage the smooth running of the *kulo*. This *kulo* irrigates around 200 *ropanis* of land in Bungamati village.

![Plate 19. Dhanabu Kulo](image)

Farmers possessing the land in the village are not from Bungamati alone; they also include farmers from Sunakothi and Chausikhel villages of Lalitpur whose agricultural land is irrigated by this *kulo*. Under the new management, the *kulo* is named *Dhanabu Kul*, and with the new management, the task of running the *kulo* was more organized,
although problems with landslides and other natural disasters remained. Then came the opportunity for the farmers to get financial support from the District Irrigation Department. The conditions for such a support were that the user group should meet 25% of the cost in cash and kind (in the form of labour) and the land to be irrigated by such a project should be at least 200 *ropanis* or more. Cash had to be shown in the form of deposit in the agricultural bank of the village or town; thus 40 farming households contributed money (Rs 200/- per *ropani*) and deposited the money in the agricultural bank in V.S. 2050. With the lump sum deposited at the bank, the association was able to get approximately a budget of Rs.700,000 from the Irrigation Department for construction of canals with pipelines and concrete wall. The source of water for this *kulo* is Nakhu River. 200 *ropanis* of rice field lie to the south of the *kulo* source. Because the budget was not so large, this *kulo* is only partly concrete and pipelined. Areas with maximum seepage and danger of landslides have concrete walls and pipelines are used for channeling the water from the source. However, problems do arise and the farmers have to manage the wear and tear themselves. Although the Department of Irrigation financed the *kulo*, it does not have the budget for its maintenance. The committee officials appoint four members in charge of running the *kulo* annually. Sometimes these four (*dhalpas*) may be outside the user committee and are paid in kind by the farmers using the *kulo*. They are paid 1 *pathi* rice per *ropani* annually. These four members are in charge of distributing water especially in the planting season. They maintain a round-the-clock night vigilance during the paddy-planting season, so that the farmers get equal distribution of water according to the rule. The fields lying close to the source of the *kulo* receive water first, and those at the bottom receive it last. Some farmers try to redirect the course of the *kulo* towards their field before their turn, and this is a common problem. This is normally done at night. So *dhalpas* act as night watchmen to see that this does not happen. If for some reason, the farmers at the source do not irrigate the field first as per rule, the water is directed towards the next in line and so on. When the turn is passed off, the farmer has to wait until all the fields are irrigated before he gets his turn. If any maintenance work is needed and cannot be resolved by these four *dhalpas* (caretaker), the other farmers are asked to give a helping hand. If any member from the user group fails to appear for such work, the 11-member committee will charge
a fine of about Rs 150/-. This money is used for buying food and drink for the working members of the organization.

Members of the committee take turns annually to be in charge of distributing water from the kulo. The 11-member committee helps solve problems and assist the four dhalpas in their work. Quarrels that happen among the farmers with regards to water distribution, is settled by the committee. Most of these elected officials are seniormost (in age) members of the committee. In the Newar society, senior members are respected and trusted to make the right judgements because of their age and experience. We see this in every aspect of Newar social life; for e.g., the guthi institutions are run by the seniormost members (thakali). If a father is a member of a guthi (e.g. si guthi), the son need not be a member if he is living in the joint household with his father even though he may have his own family. Even in this modern day association like the irrigation committee, the executive post (chief) is given to the seniormost members. The young farmers think that older members are more successful in making the disgruntled farmers listen to them either by explanation or by coaxing the farmers to understand what is relevant. The younger ones are not able to control their feelings and anger, which makes it unsuitable for managing such situations.

**Bhorle Kulo**

This is the biggest and an oldest kulo covering major agricultural areas in the Bungamati village as well as villages of Champi. According to the information from the ex-Pradhan Pancha (village chief in the panchayat system of government) and some villagers, Bhorle Kulo was known as Machhendranath kulo during the Rana rule. Its water was regarded as sacred and used as nilah or jal by the people after it crossed the Machendranath temple. Today this practice is not common and most residents do not remember it as Machhendranath kulo either. There is a story of how this kulo started. During the Rana regime the Brahman/Chettri ward of Bungamati (ward nos. 7 and 8), had a Bhandari (Chhetri jat) family whose daughter was living in the Rana Durbar (palace or court). Occasionally she visited her family in Bungamati. Since she was in the Durbar, the villagers thought that she could do a favour for the village. The villagers wanted to irrigate the pakho khet and requested the woman to put forth their appeal for permission to irrigate the pakho khet to the Rana administration. The woman did so and the Ranas
agreed to build the *kulo*. Four *dhalpas* (caretakers) were employed to take care of the *kulo* and were paid in kind by the farmers.

Plate 20. Bungamati villagers working together to repair the Bhorle kulo

In 1990 V.S. the *dhalpas* left and the *Dware* (village chief “*Mukhia*”) took the responsibility of the *kulo* management. During the Rana rule the villagers had to contribute labour for building and maintaining *kulos* as well as roads or any other public construction. No villagers could refuse to work. If anyone did not show up for work, the *Dware* would send his junior assistant (*Maha Naik*) in charge of *khet* (agricultural field) to that person’s home. Along with other helpers he would take out the wooden frame of the main door of the villager’s house and throw it into the *pokhari* (pond). The other punishment would be that the person would have to work in the *khet* without much food, except for one piece of *roti* (flat bread made of flour) with powdered chilli. In 2015 V.S. the Rana regime ended, and the Panchayat Party came to power. The management of the *kulo* was no longer in the hands of *Dware*. Between 2015-2018 V.S., *Gau Samitee* (village committee) carried out the management of the *kulo*. From 2018-2025 V.S., management was in the hands of the head of the village Panchayat (*Pradhan Pancha*). The management under *Pradhan Pancha* was not very successful, so the villagers formed
a committee called *Bhorle Kulo Samaj Samitee* (Bhorle Kulo social association), and went to the Village Panchayat Office to request the *Pradhan Pancha* to delegate responsibility of the maintenance of the *kulo* to the committee. The informant Mr. Ratna Man Tuladhar was also one of the members of the committee. After two to three years of smooth running, there were lots of political upheavals and the care and maintenance of the *kulo* went slack. From about 2036 V.S. the committee did not do much for the *kulo* because of the political situation (democratic movements for multi party system) and changes. Mr. Tuladhar was *Pradhan Pancha* during this period but with political upheavals he was also jailed and the Panchayat State refused to give him the *Pradhan Panchaship* inspite of the fact that he got the majority of votes for village *Pradhan Panchaship* because the Panchayat Administration suspected him of having an affinity towards multiparty system.

Finally, multi-party rule was established and a new Bhorle Kulo user group committee, “*upabhokta Samitee*”, was formed in 2047 V.S. The committee applied for State finance for reconstruction of the *kulo* the same year; their application was accepted and it was under the 1st Sector Project Irrigation Program of the State. The committee received around Rs.1,400,000 from the District Irrigation Department, after submitting their plan and estimated costs, a cash deposit of 5% in the Agricultural Bank, and demonstrating 20% of cash in kind (in the form of labour to be contributed by the villagers). Bhorle Kulo was one of the first to be financed under such a scheme by the State.

The committee collected Rs.16/- per ropani from those using the irrigation as labour expense for repair and maintenance. This *kulo* covers about 6 to 7 thousand ropanis of agricultural land irrigating not only the agricultural fields in Bungamati but also in the neighbouring village of Champi. Because the *kulo* is channeled across a long distance, many problems arise, especially in the monsoon when rain causes a lot of damage. The limited allotted budget could not meet the cost of constructing any more concrete *kulos*.

There are many problems faced in proper maintenance of *Bhorle Kulo* as pointed out by the village chiefs, the members of District Development Committee, and the chief officials of the *Bhorle Kulo* Committee. The maintenance of the *kulo* depends entirely on the villagers using the kulo because the state does not allot any budget for *kulo* maintenance. The elected official members of the *Bhorle Kulo* Committee are
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responsible for all the problems concerning the *kulo* and in mobilizing the task force for repair and other maintenance related work. Recently, the managerial members of the committee have not been able to manage the problems of this kulo, so the VDC office and some of its members are trying to mobilize some labour force from the villagers; some budget has also been allotted to the *Bhorle Kulo* maintenance from the fund received by the Village Development office from the State.

Some of the problems pointed out to me were as follows:

i. Once the *kulo* is built under the Sector Project of the State, there is no additional budget for its regular maintenance from the Department of District Irrigation. They do not have any surplus amount to provide such services to all the irrigation projects. The village is responsible for its maintenance. This depends to some extent on the management skill of the elected officials of the *Upabhokta* (user group) committee, and cooperation of the users as well. Some members of the VDC office as well as other user committee members said that the problem in the village (Bungamati) is that committees are formed to apply funds from the state for construction like irrigation, roads etc.; as soon as the fund comes and the construction is completed the committee disappears too. There is no one to manage the maintenance work, to encourage farmers to give their labour for the common cause. *Bhorle Kulo* being a large and long *kulo*, the possibility of damage through flood and landslides is very high. It will take a considerable budget to get concrete walls to prevent the kulo from being destroyed by landslides, which occur every year. The fund provided for the construction of *kulo* by the Irrigation project program was not enough to construct concrete walls throughout the entire length of the *kulo*.

ii. There is also a lot of seepage of water through holes and cracks, as the *kulo* does not have concrete walls.

iii. Villagers are not easily motivated in contributing labour. They are reluctant to provide labour and equally reluctant to pay money for hired labour.

Interviews with the chief official of Bhorle Upabhokta Committee (he is no longer active in the committee work) and several other members of the committee who expressed similar thoughts regarding the *kulo* maintenance. The following is an excerpt from an
interview, which shows the problems faced by the committee in managing the running of Bhorle Kulo and their diminishing interest in the work.

**Self:** How long have you been the member of the Bhorle Kulo committee?

**D:** Tuladhar: Since 2047 V.S. when they applied for funding at the District Irrigation office. The kulo was there but during the monsoon, landslides caused lot of problems. In 2047 VS, I along with other members worked continuously for 40 days to bring the kulo to working order. It is a very hard and unpaying task.

**Self:** What were the conditions for applying for funds to the District Irrigation office.

**D:** There should be at least 500 ropanis of land to be irrigated. The village should contribute 25% of the total amount received in cash and labour. After the money is sanctioned and the kulo constructed, it would be the responsibility of the village committee to see to its maintenance.

**Self:** How did you manage to get the 25% needed? Was labour contributed or cash or both?

**D:** We decided to collect Rs 16/- per ropani from the villagers and they were not needed to offer labour. We had to open an account in the Agricultural Bank and showed the amount deposited after which the District Irrigation office would make the necessary investigations and sanction the money when they are satisfied with their investigation.

**Self:** How much money was sanctioned by the office?

**D:** Around Rs.1,400, 000/-

**Self:** What areas did this kulo covers?

**D:** It covers Champi, and Bungamati,

**Self:** How is the maintenance of the kulo organized? I heard that the kulo is not in good condition and the villagers are not motivated to help in its maintenance.

**D:** For about 3 years we collected Rs. 16/- per ropani, twice in a year from farmers as it seemed more feasible than contributing labour. This was because those farmers with 1 ropani of agricultural field had to labour the same amount as those with larger areas like 10 or more ropanis. This created dissatisfaction among the farmers. So it was decided that money would be contributed and
labour would be hired with the money. However, this is not working either. There are eleven elected office holders in this Committee in charge of managing the kulo. They were each given a ward (twa) to collect the money. The problem for the collectors is the fact that villagers do not want to part with their money easily even though it was their decision to contribute money rather than labour. One has to go for days to one house just to get Rs.16/-. Besides, all the committee members are not sincere in their work as collectors either. Since it is a job without salary it becomes difficult to expect the members to spare the time for such a work when farmers are always putting them off by asking them to come the next day, and the next day never comes. For the past two or three years, there has been no monetary contribution and very little labour contribution. The few devoted committee members have done whatever repair they can do, some are too old and some have died. I do not have any time to devote to the work of kulo. I do not even get to drink tea and have to work day and night when there is damage to the kulo. I have even sold 3 ropanis of my land irrigated by this kulo. Though I am still its managerial chief in name, I have not contributed much work for about 2 years now. I do not have the time. At present about Rs.15,000 to 20,000/- per year is allocated from the village development budget towards the maintenance of Bhorle kulo. Dhalpas are hired for repair and distribution of water from the kulo. They are not paid money but collect dhan (paddy) and gahu (wheat) from the farmers (4 mana dhan per ropani and 2 mana wheat per ropani).

Many committee members I talked to seem to feel the same way like Mr. D.Tuladhar in the interview. The villagers were uncooperative. Getting money from them was difficult, the working members had to take villagers’ criticism of distrust and insinuation of using the money for themselves. Most managing members seem to be giving up their managerial work. I was told that there were years when no farmers would contribute labour and very few contributed money and some of these eleven members had to go and work by themselves, getting to the kulo around 3 o’clock in the morning and making repairs.
There are others who point out that the Committee was not working towards motivating the farmers. After they got the budget for construction of the *kulo* their interest as the managing committee has diminished.

Talking to the VDC official (*adhyaksa*), I was told that the village is facing a great problem with the *kulo*. The *Bhorle kulo* is the longest *kulo* irrigating fields in Champi village as well as Bungamati. The Nakhu River, source of this *kulo*, is in Tika Bhairab about 2 hours walk from Bungamati. The distance between the source and the fields of irrigation in Bungamati is very long and Bungamati is the last area to be irrigated. Thus the Bungamati farmers and workers are the sufferers in terms of repairing damages caused by landslides before the water reaches Bungamati; landslides during monsoon cannot be avoided. The damage by landslides has been massive this year (1999 AD) creating a monetary need towards repairing the damages; to make matters worse, restoring the *kulo* meant removing the house of a villager. The villager is already protesting and the VDC office does not have the resource to replace the villager with land and house somewhere else. The other alternative is to change the course of the canal, which means having to dig the canal on land belonging to several villagers, which is not easy. There are also various political parties involved, which work towards creating disunity among the villagers so no one will be willing to part with their land for common good.

However, the VDC office allotted some money last year, and other members of the District Development Committee were able to get about Rs. 50,000/- from the Irrigation Department, and villagers were mobilized to contribute labour after the monsoon to get the *kulo* repaired.

When I was in the village last year, farmers were called upon to contribute labour after the monsoon or their fields could not get irrigated for the winter crop. Newars in Bungamati do not perform any special worship in their rice fields except for feeding frogs on *Jani Purne* day or when some evil spirit in the field has caused illness to the owner; but a worship is performed at the source of *kulo* (usually egg is offered as a sacrifice), before taking up the task of *kulo* repair and occasionally when worship is required. It is done for the successful completion of the repair so they may have proper supply of water to irrigate their fields.
It is a difficult task to keep Bhorle Kulo well maintained. *Dhanabu Kulo* being smaller has fewer problems. It is easy to mobilize and manage the work force in the *Dhanabu kulo* as the number of farmers using this kulo is far smaller compared to *Bhorle kulo’s*. The *Bhorle Kulo’s* course through hilly areas is prone to landslides; lack of sufficient finance to cope with the maintenance is another problem. It is also difficult to force the farmers to contribute labour in the Democratic Political system. In the Rana regime it was easier to mobilize labour. The power and authority lay in one single party; today various parties are involved and this causes friction among the farmers. The Committee members are also in a difficult position; they do not get paid for their work, they have to earn their livelihood elsewhere besides agriculture leaving little time for it; this leaves them with very little choice but to neglect the work when farmers do not co-operate. Villagers do not part with money easily because it is a scarce item, and skepticism about the committee officials’ proper utilization of the money is quite prevalent. Most farmers are now involved in other income sources besides agriculture to make ends meet, thus time expended without immediate monetary payment is not tempting. Besides, the new political system has given them a sense of freedom; no one can forcefully make them work. It is a difficult situation but I have seen many sincere villagers trying to get the kulo running even though presented with limited means.

There is another small kulo that irrigates about 40 ropanis of *khet* in Bungamati, which is managed by the farmers themselves. The Khokana Kulo, which irrigates the neighbouring village of Bhaisepati also irrigates a small portion of *khet* in Bungamati area.

At the irrigation “station” we see there are a number of very differently constituted actors involved (from the individual farmers, the user committees, the VDC, the District Development Committee, Irrigation Department, to Political parties); actors who may not have identical interests with regards to the transactions involved in the financing and running of the irrigation works. We have also seen how the scale of the irrigation works affects the trust and sanctions required to make it function efficiently. In order to understand this we also have to look closer at the micro-level of farm management units.
11.6 Farm Management

Most of the village residents are involved in agriculture, especially the housewives. In most households, the family members - wife, husband, sons and daughters - are all involved in agricultural work during the planting and harvesting season. The older members like the grandfathers and grandmothers do not work in the field. Agriculture being seasonal, most households have male members working in other sectors besides agriculture. My survey shows that the majority of the Maharjan (Jyapu) thar in Bungamati, work as hired labourers in construction works like roads, buildings, and etc. A small percent of them work in the government and private offices, and some have taken up the woodcraft business. Among the Sakyas and Tuladhars, woodcraft business is the most common alternative occupation.

Members of a household manage the agricultural work with some hired labour during the planting season. Throughout the year, housewives are more involved in the everyday work in the agricultural field while men usually till the ground before planting season. Those households having more than 2 ropanis of land may need to hire labour for this part of the agricultural work if there aren’t enough males in the family to do the job during this period. After the tilling is done, wives, daughters (those in the working age-group), and daughters-in-law, work to make the soil fine before planting. They use a long handled tool to break the soil into finer particles before planting. While planting rice, both males and females work together. After the planting is over, females are more involved in the agricultural work since most males work other jobs. Weeding, fertilizing, and regular inspection of the field is mostly the work of the female, although basically it is done by anyone who has the time to do so; harvesting is a joint effort of both males and females. Though males the paddy to the mill for grinding, most of the chores after harvesting (like drying the crops) is done by females. The work of the female is also that of making aeyla (home made spirit) and thon (home made beer) in Bungamati. Aeyla and thon are made for festivals and for hired labour used for ploughing the field and other agricultural works. Any work concerning the irrigation canal (kulo) is a male’s job. Males take turns to check if their field is receiving enough water, putting up night vigilance in the fields especially during the rice planting season, crucial periods of water, and periods when farmers are tempted to forget civility and honesty in guiding the kulo’s water.
Much of the arguments and clashes among the farmers break out during this period of sharing water from the kulo.

In addition to family-farm labour there also certain mechanisms for mobilizing outside labour. *Bwala* or exchange labour has become almost extinct in Bungamati. Previously, *bwala system* was practiced only among the males as it meant equal amount of labour exchanged; female labour was regarded inferior to male (M.C. Regmi 1978). Today, *bwala* is no longer practiced among the males in Bungamati. The reason might be that the males in the agricultural families have other employment, so they find it more profitable to hire day-labourers for tilling and other heavy agricultural tasks, while females in the household do the lighter work. However, females in Bungamati still practice *bwala* system for breaking soil into finer particles after the field has been tilled or ploughed.

*Gwali* is a form of labour mobilization, which is not so common. Here the neighbours are called upon for help in the agricultural task with no direct compensation. With recent socio-economic changes, people have less time to make such co-operative labour input. In case of the old and sick, help is sometimes extended by relatives and neighbours, though this practice is not so common. In Bungamati, majority of the older people hire day labourers for harder jobs. Some older people have given up cultivation. One old Maharjan told me that he has given his share of land to his youngest son who pays him *kut*.

*Jyami* or hired labour is the most common form of mobilizing labour in recent years not only in Bungamati, but all over the valley. The main task done by such a labour is the ploughing of the field before rice or winter crops plantation. The need for hired labour is not merely because of the large area of agricultural field but mainly because there is not enough labour force in the households. Most households in Bungamati are nuclear families. Such ploughing labour is hired from Danwar village, which lies to the south of Bungamati. They bring their animals to plough the field and are paid daily wages from Rs.80 to Rs.100 in addition to food and drinks. I was told most households make *ayyla* to offer the drink to the contract labourers rather than for self-consumption.

In addition to the mentioned factors, namely inputs of land, water, labour, tools and draft power, there are a few more important inputs in agricultural production, those being fertilizers and seeds.
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The traditional use of animal fertilizer is still common whenever possible to find. The lack of animal husbandry in the village as well as most areas of the valley contribute to the diminishing use of animal fertilizers. Cowdung was the common animal fertilizer in the past; today, there are poultry farms that provide some fertilizers, which people have started using. Pig farms also provide some amount of fertilizers although in Bungamati they are not used. Most high jat Newar groups in Bungamati, chicken and pigs are taboo. Other traditional fertilizers used by the Newars in the village is “Saulah”; Sau meaning manure, lah meaning water (water fertilizer). Saulah can found in areas of the field where water oozes out from the ground making the soil wet and muddy. The farmers would take the muddy dark water from these areas to use it as manure. There are still a few places in Bungamati where the farmers get Saulah, although recent lack of large plots of land has made this almost impossible. Palah refers to water left stagnant for about 15 days in the field. This water is used for planting crops and is believed to work as a fertilizer. However, the most frequently and commonly used fertilizer by the farmers today is the chemical fertilizer. It is easily available, easy to use and effective.

**Seed:** Most farmers in Bungamati use seeds produced by their own crops or plants. The paddy seeds are separated after the harvest and kept aside for the next plantation. Seeds are also obtained from State-run Agricultural organization. Bungamati has one agricultural cooperation, which provides the villagers with various agricultural support like seeds, fertilizers, and medicine for livestock. The farmers in the village also use hybrid seeds.

Rice is cultivated in summer or the monsoon season, and wheat in winter; besides rice and wheat, seasonal vegetables like potatoes, onion, garlic, chilli pepper, etc. are also cultivated. Agriculture in the valley greatly depends on rain for water, and most of the cultivation here in the valley is basically for self-consumption. The Jyapus of Bungamati like those from the locality of Pulchowk cultivate rice basically for their own consumption although products like potatoes, garlic, onions, wheat and other seasonal vegetables, are sold after keeping aside the amount needed for household consumption. Most Jyapu households in Bungamati own agricultural fields for cultivation of rice, maize, wheat, millet and vegetables. Rice and wheat is planted in *Khet*, whereas maize
and millet are planted in Pakho land. Khet with irrigation facilities produce around 65kgs of rice while khet with no such facility produce around 49 kilogramms.

Changes in the economic and political environment have affected management units’ decisions with regards to how they allocate land, labour and water for productive purposes, and their income to alternative uses. Most households cannot depend entirely on agriculture for the expenses incurred in the family. The children have to at least get school education, and if possible further education for a better future. Even the traditional farming group (Maharjans) is wishing for a better education for their children. The traditional system of males finding work outside their homes is the responsibility of most males working in different sectors besides agriculture, while the housewives are more confined to agricultural work. In most households, we find males have higher education qualification so they are in position to get office, teaching and other jobs that require some level of education. As manual labourers, males receive higher salary than the females, which is another reason why males work as labourers, while women take care of the agricultural work at home.

Sometimes, land resource is used for alternative purposes rather than agriculture if it brings better profits in the alternative sector. For example, land lying by the riverbanks is in danger of being eroded by the river water. A Maharjan man told me that he had 4 ropanis of land by the riverbank but now it is reduced to only 2 ropanis. Another farmer said that he sold his land, which was by the riverbank and used the money to invest in his woodcraft business, which was more profitable. Some others have sold their land because they found that input of time and labour to agriculture did not give them as much profit as they could get from woodcraft, grocery store and other investments. Sometimes a household’s decision of investment of their income in ceremonial expenses or in feasts is affected by the expectation of building an image of economic status: to earn villagers’ respect and acknowledgment of wealth by performing lavish ceremonies and feasts. Agricultural products for consumption depend on the size of the household, and the amount of produce. If the produce exceeds the family’s consumption need, then the extra produce is sold.
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12 WATER AND ITS SYMBOLIC QUALITY

The many-voiced song of the river echoed softly. Siddhartha looked into the river and saw many pictures in the flowing water. The river's voice was sorrowful. It sang with yearning and sadness, flowing towards its goal...Siddhartha...was now listening intently.... to this song of a thousand voices ..... then the great song of a thousand voices consisted of one word: OM.....Perfection...... From that hour Siddhartha ceased to fight against his destiny.

--(Hermann Hesse, Siddhartha, 1951)

To the people of the subcontinent, water speaks with many voices, or rather people are tuned to hear many voices from it. What they hear depends on how they have been attuned to listen (including seeing). This is brought about by exposure to webs of significance spun into the very complex patterns of conventionalized symbols expressed in tales, objects, and rituals. Water has attributes, which are apt to convey different kinds of meanings, even contrasting meanings. What is conveyed cannot be assumed from first principles, but has to be explored in the situations where water is symbolically used. Furthermore the meaning spun around water in these contexts is brought on by the symbolic use of other natural items, most importantly fire. I have not gone into the patterns, which is manifested in the way different material items have been spun into specific symbolic forms or events. I shall just mention that fire is an element, which is apt for symbolic use in connection with water.

The natural forces of fire and water are brought together in a unity of opposites in the worldviews of many early civilizations. Both forces are often seen as purifying as well as protective and are viewed by many as being connected with the cosmic powers of the sun and moon. Where they are truly combined -- fire as the sun is usually male, while water as the moon is female. Where the fire is included more into the earthly sphere it may also receive a feminine character (e.g., fire in the earth, preserved in the womb); where rain is viewed as the semen of heaven, which is usually personified as male, it takes on a male character.
Water has many qualities making it appear animated. On this basis it is understandable that water (e.g. rain, sea, lakes, and rivers) might become a natural phenomenon worthy of worship. Water is usually in motion; it brings new life to the dead vegetation and dried land; it refreshes men and animals, the tired and the ill, and it heals. It also has a cleansing quality as it washes dirt, dissolves dust, making it most suitable for purifying the soul (e.g. after violation or commission of a sin of any kind). In the sacred Hindu scriptures the origin of people of the subcontinent is frequently connected with rivers: “the deeply ingrained memory of an origin near these life-giving rivers, which spout from the home of the gods where the great snows fall from the sky. These memories are part of the history and mythology of Hinduism, part of the blend of legend and reality, and reach into our own age. No wonder Mother Ganges is still holy, that the source of the Ganges near Badrinath is a pilgrimage to Mt. Kailas itself, and that the Himalayas are revered even by the people of the plains who may never make the journey and may never see them. Ganges water is renowned amongst Hindus for its purity and its purifying powers. Ganges water is used for oblations and celebrations, such as at weddings, when even those in the far south may pay substantial money for water to be brought in containers for their rituals. Some of the holiest cities of Hinduism lie on its banks ” (Chapman, G.P and M. Thompson 1995). In South Asian countries like India and Nepal, water is useful for not merely purifying the soul, but also purifying various kinds of pollution that people face in such a society. Besides having these positive qualities, water can also be destructive like seaquakes, floods, and storms. Some of the most important mythical-religious aspects symbolized by water are the following: the primal matter; the instrument of the purification and expiation; a vivifying force, a fructifying force; and a revealing and judging instrument.

People of Southern Asia localize cosmic power in water. This idea is often accompanied by myths like the earth being fished out or emerging from the primeval water. The legend of Kathmandu valley speaks of the Valley as a dark fathomless void of water -- a lake inhabited by serpents (nagas) into which the spirit of God was floating in the form of a flame in the lotus flower.

From this valley of water (a primordial lake) the heavenly body of Adi Buddha in the form of flame on a lotus flower appeared from the depths of water, which forms the
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present day Swayambhunath (the self-existent one) and the city Kathmandu. Thus water is viewed as the foundation of all lives.

The mortal Bodhi Satwa (Manjushri) came for pilgrimage after hearing about the flame in the lake. So God appeared in the void and watery chaos; his mortal servant drained the lake of water creating what we call, heaven and earth. The flame in the lotus flower is the Swayambhunath today (the seat of God) and the city of Kathmandu, the living place for the mortals. Thus order was created out of the chaos which was a fathomless lake inhabited by serpents. Kathmandu being borne of water can be seen as a symbolic expression of the role of water in the social life of the people in the villages, towns and cities of the valley, as well as the whole country

Water is viewed as an instrument for purification and expiation. Water lustrations are especially necessary after touching the dead, any polluted item or polluted beings, and as purificatory washing for priests and kings.

Pollution of any form is purified by taking a holy bath into the sacred river before other rituals of purification. Before starting any ritual, one bathes to purify oneself with holy water ‘nilah”, and only then is worship performed. Priests bathe with unpolluted water preferably from holy rivers, wells or lakes before performing rites and rituals. Water is also important in death purification rituals, and initiation rituals. In Bungamati, people use the ponds in the village for performing various death rituals instead of going to the Bagmati, which is at some distance from the village. Sometimes, purification is also performed by using ordinary tap water into which gold is dipped (Sunpani: Nepali) and sprinkled over the body or around the house. In Newari it is called lulah, (the act of sprinkling of water over the body). In case of pollution caused by the touch of menstruating woman, sprinkling of such water is commonly used as purification in the Nepalese/Newari society. Some years ago, Newars in Bungamati would bathe to purify themselves if they accidentally touched pigs or untouchable jats; today however, people sprinkle nilah or sunpani to purify such pollution. Some may not even bother to do that.

“Nasila” in Newari means purifying the mouth by sprinkling water three times into the mouth and face. This purification is performed before worship or before getting nilah for household or for traditional tantric treatment of illness when water is needed if one is unable to purify by bathing.
It is a very common practice in the Hindu-Buddhist society of Nepal as well as in India that water is used to symbolize reverence. The washing of the feet of the great sages and devatas (gods) has been a common practice to show one’s reverence in this society. The kings would wash the feet of the sages with water before offering them food. Feet of the gods are washed with water and water from those feet is drunk as prasad. During Machhendranath festival, the priests sprinkle the bath water collected in a container to the crowds; most Newars eagerly wait for this moment, pushing themselves towards the priests to receive this blessing. Washing his feet and drinking the water from his feet is regarded as the highest blessing. Water from the feet of gods and sages is also used as a curing potion. For example, descendants of the Jhul-bahal Thakuris worshipped the das-paramita-bauddha devatas by washing their feet and feeding them with khira (rice cooked in milk). One of the descendants was married to a woman from Bhaktapur and used to visit his father-in-law and told him about his worship. The father-in-law wanted to see them, so he went to Patan to his son-in-law’s house. While the son-in-law was serving the devatas with food, the father-in-law mixed poison in some food and offered them to the devatas. The bauddha devatas knowing of his treachery recited mantras while eating and the poison did not affect them; instead the Thakuri became affected by it and no physician could cure him. When his son-in-law entreated the bauddha devatas for his cure, they suggested that Thakuri drink the water with which their feet had been washed; he was cured (Wright 1990).

The wives wash the feet of their husbands and drink the water. It is the dharma of the wives to respect and revere their husbands as god. Here the reverence of the husband is symbolized by such an act. This practice is more common among the high jat Parbatiya. By such an act, the husband occupies the place of devata (god) while his wife occupies the place of the devotee – arrangement, which definitely symbolizes male domination. In the past, wives performed this symbolic act everyday; today, it is performed occasionally, at a time of marriage, on certain festivals and ceremonies. In a marriage, there is also a rite of symbolically drinking water after washing the feet of the daughter and son-in-law in most Newar and Parbatiya societies. The parents of the daughter perform this rite symbolizing the respect and honour to the son-in-law to whom the daughter is transferred. The parents of the daughter will always be in debt to the son-in-law as the
lord and master of their daughter. In most Hindu societies, the son-in-law is always treated with difference and great respect.

Water is an idiom or the fundamental symbolic substance in the definition of Newars as well as Parbatiya jat relationships. In Bungamati, the line drawn between the water acceptable jats (jyupim), and water unacceptable jats (majyupim) is still commonly observed in the social context of marriage, membership in si guthi, seating arrangement in the village feasts, access to the inner restricted sanctum of a house like kitchen, worship rooms, drinking water and food items, as discussed in the preceding chapters.

It is also used in defining other relationships, like kin relationship. For instance, if blood relations through some dispute or quarrel want to keep no relation with each other, it is expressed as “pani baheki” (Nepali term also used by Newars in Bungamati); this means water communication is no longer valid. It marks the end of the kin relationship, curtailment of participation in any rituals like death, birth and other rites, and festivities.

Some villagers expressing views on the new debated field of women’s right to inherit ancestral property felt that if such a bill was passed by the parliament, the close relationship enjoyed by brothers and sisters, daughters and sons would be over, and that it will be a case of “pani baheki” between the male and female siblings in most households in the village.

Water as fructifying symbol, is manifested in the magical rites in which water serves as a substitute for semen or the fertility of men. Battles of gods and heroes with mythical beings, beasts, and monsters that hold back the fructifying water are widespread in mythology. The liberation of water during the mythical battle is equivalent to the end of the dry season or a drought and the revival of vegetation. In Indian mythology this is exemplified in Indra’s slaying of urtra. In Kathmandu, it is seen in the myth of Machhendranath who was brought with tantric expertise to fulfil Gorakhnath’s wish so that he may release the nagas and drought in the valley would end.

In the subcontinent, from the period of the early Vedas down to present Hinduism, water has been regarded as a tangible manifestation of the divine essence. “In the beginning, everything was like a sea without a light,” (RigVeda, X. 129.3.); to this day one of the most common and simple objects of worship in the daily ritual is a jar or pitcher filled with water, representing the presence of the divinity and serving in the place of a sacred...
image. Boundless and imperishable, the cosmic water is at once the immaculate source of all things and the dreadful grave. In the Hindu religion, waters are understood as a primary materialization of Vishnu’s Maya-energy. Vishnu dissolves the Universe with fire and water after the cycle of four yugas have been completed and the ordered city of Man, the substance of the world organism, has deteriorated beyond salvage. Vishnu with his power consumes the entire universe with fire and finally, in the form of great cloud, he sheds torrential rain and under the flood of the God-become-Rain, it is taken back into the primal ocean from which it arose at the universal dawn. He then lies partly submerged, partly afloat in cosmic ocean, sleeping. “This giant, ‘Lord of Maya’, and the cosmic ocean on which he is recumbent are dual manifestations of a single essence; for the ocean as well as the human form is Vishnu” (Zimmer, 1962). Both in the Hindu as well as Buddhist mythology the symbol of water is the serpent (naga); Vishnu is represented normally as reposing on the coils of a prodigious snake, and his favorite symbolic animal is the serpent Ananta, or “Endless”, giving him the form of reptile. Vishnu, the Supreme Being in the form of water determined to produce the universe again, gathers and stores within himself a glowing energy. Through this energy, wind and fire is produced. The fire consumes water and void is created forming heavenly space. Presently out of his cosmic body, he puts forth a single lotus, with thousand petals of pure gold and together with the lotus he puts forth the God-Creator of the Universe, Brahma.

12.1 Proverbs Linking Water (Rain, Pools, Thirst) To Social Life

The Newari and Nepali proverbs where water is constantly used to link human behaviour and nature show how closely this substance of nature is related to the socio-cultural life of the people. I'll present a few Newari and Nepali proverbs used by the Newars in Bungamati to explain this close connection of water and social life of the people.

*Bani waimah Mijan ra sute waimah wahyu biswash maruh:* This is a Newari proverb meaning “one cannot trust a boy who visits at night nor the rain that comes in the morning”. Proverbs express a truth or common fact ascertained by experience or observation. Wet rice culture of the valley depends greatly on the rain. Historically, drought seems to be fairly regular in the valley; Bungamati suffers from scanty rainfall leading to drought every five to six years. Hence Newars seem to be incessantly
preoccupied with rain. Many a day Newar farmers must have eagerly waited for the rain and the first drops of rain in the morning must have escalated their hopes only to be disappointed when the rain did not go further than those promising drops in the morning. They have linked this phenomenon to human behavior. A boy who visits a girl at night definitely cannot be trusted because his intentions are questionable since he wants to hide his identity in the darkness of night.

*Pani parcha gumle tarcha:* A Nepali proverb that again refers to rain; it means that when rain falls, problems are solved.

*Lah jak dayka(n) takki makhu, ka(n) jak nyayka ja li makhu:* Water cannot be made thicker by continuous boiling just as work cannot be accomplished by mere talking.

*Kunda, Kunda pani, munda, munda buddhi:* Literally it means water from various kundas taste different so do the human opinions or intelligence. The Latin translation given in Turner 1980 is—quote homines tot sententiae; the English translation of which means “there are as many opinions as there are people”.

*Pani pyunu mulko bibha garnu kulko:* Drink water from the spring, marry from *kul* (lineage). This means that just as it is best to drink water from a spring as it provides tasty clean water which is good for maintaining a healthy body; so it is to marry from noble lineage as such a marriage will make healthy and happy marriage life.

*Pani pyunu chhanera guru banaunu chunera:* Literally it means drink filtered water, select your teacher wisely. This means that just as the filtering process applies to water, since pure and clean water makes a healthy life, so should the selection process to teachers; if the teacher is not chosen wisely, one’s life could unhealthy and miserable.

These proverbs are part of people’s culture handed down from generations and used in their daily social interaction; because water is an inseparable part of life, it is not very surprising to find that people have used water as an idiom for articulating the maxims in the society.
13 CONCLUSION

In conventional anthropological works, there is a tendency to focus on some kind of named group as a universe existing in itself. In a civilization like Nepal, trying to understand the “lifeworld” of people living in a particular village by only studying the objects and events that can be observed in the village is like believing that one can understand the pattern of a mosaic by only looking at a few pieces in it. The works of anthropologists like Barth, Groenhaug, Geertz, Sinha, Marriott, Appadurai and many of the so-called post-modernists, have forcefully advised us to search for linkages which connect people at the local level in larger systems of political, economic and communicative interdependencies. On the one hand, the Newars cannot be adequately understood without locating them in large streams of cultural traditions, political power and economic exchange. On the other, although Newars in Nepal are seen as a category of people distinct from others within a larger scale of national and sub-continental socio-cultural universe, they cannot be assumed to constitute a culturally homogeneous group. Not only do jat differentiation create cultural differences, but every Newar settlement irrespective of size has carved out its specific ways of being Newars. Rather than looking for the least common denominator of Newarness on the level of overt forms of behaviour, I have tried to search for some of the processes that make Bungamati a special variant of, and complementary to, other variations of Newar community life. If we look at the historical background of the emergence of the Newar civilization, it seems that it is a product of groups of different origin (even from India) being absorbed into the urban communities of Kathmandu valley at various periods in history. Though they may have been culturally and socially distinct (as well as different in physical appearance) from other groups in the country, they became assimilated into the jat-based division of labour in the urban Newar cities and over time this led to the creation of what we see as “Newarness”. What is this Newarness? One aspect or dimension of this is seen in what Declan Quigley (1995) writes about the complex and quintessentially urban character of Newar Society, the evidence of which is provided by the spectacular royal cities of Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur (Patan). However this urbaneness is not confined to these spectacular cities alone. In fact every town and tiny villages display the urban
architectural style of high, brick-built houses, tightly packed together along narrow streets. Bungamati is one such village, and it is the miniature urban city. The Newarness of the village instantly confronts a person as soon as he/she steps into this village. The other features of Newar urbanism are that the majority of the population are peasants, and that trade plays a vital role in the Newar communities. Traditionally, the importance of trade arose because the valley lay along an ancient trade route between India and Tibet. Today, Kathmandu the capital city, and center for development aid has brought about new trends in trade with regards to imported goods from the industrialized world. The Newar community, as most anthropologists and people agree, exhibit a pronounced territorial introversion (Quigley 1995). The Newar settlements from the ancient cities like Bhaktapur to tiny villages like Bungamati are protected from the dangerous outside by a ring of deities. The introversion is manifested in local jat divisions. Both the Buddhist and Hindu Newars are organized along jat lines. The local jat division identifies everyone in the village and marks out members of the community from outsiders who do not belong. As Quigley (1995) puts it, jat divisions are underscored, like all other aspects of Newar social life by pervasive ritual. While certain rituals bring together all the inhabitants of a particular settlement, many others are primarily oriented to an individual or particular kinship group, be they a household, or a group of affinies or perhaps a lineage.

Another distinctive feature of the Newar community, which is found in all Newar settlements in the valley, is a system of socio-religious associations called guthis. There are a number of guthis in a Newar community but the most important ones are the diwali or digu deya guthi (the lineage as ritual unit), and the si guthi (association members of households overseeing death rituals). They are an important part of Newar social, ritual and moral order.

Robert Levy (1990) giving the description of Bhaktapur as “archaic city” states: “Thus in Bhaktapur, households with their own deities and religious practices are joined in patrilineal extended families with their own deities and practices. Patrilineal groups are in turn joined in wider inclusive units called thars whose members have a common surname. The thars are in turn organized into what we will call “macrostatus levels”.”
Levy refers to *jat* levels in the Newar community as macrostatus levels; this feature is common in all Newar settlements as we can see in Bungamati.

These macrostatus levels or the *jat* hierarchy in a Newar society is expressed by patterns of marriage, eating and association and for many groups, places of residence. This is a common feature of most *jat* society in the subcontinent as well. The question arises as to why *jat* should be the main principle of social organization in the traditional Newar cities? According to Levy’s argument this is ordained from above, by the Brahman priests, and the rest of the society goes along with it although it is not entirely clear why they go along with it. As I have tried to argue on the basis of historical information available, this must not be interpreted as meaning that the Brahmins were the creators of the *jat* system. They are the custodians of an ideology, which among other things serve to legitimize not only the *jat* system, but also the position of the Chhetri ruler in the *jat*-based states.

It is the close identification of occupation with total personal identity, which seems to be a characteristic feature in the emergence of early forms of division of labour. In the emergence of centralized political states, it is clearly in the interest of central leadership to promote such a division of labour. This promotion is both for the purpose of developing and maintaining supply of specialist in delivery of certain goods and services, and for improving the means of production. Probably even more important, is to improve means of destruction (weapons), and maybe just as important is entertaining different specialists in cultural expressions (dance, singing, architecture, painting ritual etc.) which serve to install reverence to, and add legitimacy of the political elite (see Barth 1960). Although the origin of *jat* may lie in macro political processes, this does not mean that its reproduction is located in the same kind of processes. When the legitimizing ideology is solidly established with ritual specialists and with a stake in maintaining it, people may be so influenced by *jat* ideas relating to the importance of husbanding assumed qualities in the constitution of one’s self that they in micro-level daily behaviour, reproduce *jat* distinction even if the importance of *jat* as a principle for division of labour, has disappeared along with the sanctioning state apparatus. I think we see this phenomena in India (today) where *jat* differentiation is still very much a fact of life in daily interaction, although it hardly plays a role in their division of labour which is
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based on principles of capitalism and state run enterprises. By looking at the importance of jat in micro-level interaction, we may also get rid of another distortion in anthropological representations of the so-called Newar jat system. The main importance is not that it is a “Newar” system, but that anybody in our society whether Newar or not, is concerned about managing transfer of influences which affect an individual person’s “moral” status. Whether this concern is deeply felt or not, the fact is that people sanction each other with regards to how people behave in this respect. Though I personally do not appreciate such an attitude, I still am part of it when it comes to comporting myself in the presence of others. Thus I maintain clear interaction boundaries vis a vis my low jat Newari friends, while my high jat Newari friends maintain very clear interaction boundaries vis a vis me. It is this differentiation and not the so-called “ethnic” identity or religious affiliation of the interacting partner, which is important. To speak of a Newari Buddhist jat system as existing independently of the Newari Hindu jat system, is according to me, a product of biases imported by scholars brought up in western confessional religions.

Coming back to Barth’s argument that states: “Meaning is something conferred on an object or an event by a person, not something enshrined in that object or event- that is, it arises in the act of interpretation” (Barth1993). Through the many and contradictory meanings the Newars confer on water, it becomes overdetermined. It means so many things in different contexts – it is purification; it symbolizes division among people; it cleanses; it destroys; it is prasad (a blessing and a gift); and it is a substance through which life is brought out from the seas and oceans or the primordial lake. In my story of plough woman, I discussed how the act of a woman ploughing the field was interpreted by the people as a sign of inauspiciousness based on the traditional beliefs because of the consequent event of drought. Following Barth’s (ibid) concept, this act of ploughing and the event of drought in itself is meaningless. The villagers conferred the meaning of inauspiciousness on such an act because of the consequence, which followed: the event of drought. If the event of drought had not followed the act, the traditional belief that women should not plough the field would not have such meaningful impact on the village society. Though traditionally the belief might have existed, it would not have developed into such a meaningful proportion or negative interpretation which led the villagers to
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ostracize the woman. They did not allow her to touch the village water thus making her a symbol of inauspiciousness. Men would not look at, and her own household whom she ploughed for, threw her out. In Bungamati, the Newar community does not confer the same meaning to the act of woman ploughing because traditionally Newars cultivate by hoeing and not ploughing. The village has faced many events of drought but not as a consequence of women ploughing. Events of drought are sometimes blamed on the Panejus of the Machhendranath temple. Some people in the village may not like certain Panejus, and if drought occurs during their period of duty at the temple, they regard it as the unlikable Panejus shortcomings. These shortcomings can manifest in various forms, namely the Panejus’ carelessness about purity and pollution, or the Panejus’ impurity in some way; because god is not pleased for some reason or the other, or worship of appeasement has not been performed. Such manifestations are put forth for the explanation of drought. While this Newar village has little to say about the inauspiciousness of women ploughing, the Parbatiya village in the story had a more meaningful interpretation for such an act. Today, while we still hear of some Parbatiya village ostracizing women who plough the field, we also hear of villages with similar traditional beliefs, where women plough and are not being ostracized. There are some remote villages where the political movement of Maobadi (Maoists opposition group), have had vast effects on villagers. Most men, either for fear of pressure by the maoists to join their party, or fear in terms of being hunted and questioned by government police, have relented to ostracizing these ploughing women. These villages being dependent on agriculture leave women with no choice but to plough their fields themselves. Under normal circumstances, people would have conferred inauspicious meaning to such an act, but because of the changed situation, the people are not in a position to do so; if women do not plough in these villages, there will be no food for the household. So how an act is interpreted, depends on a person/persons who make the society, as well the circumstances or situations in that period of time.

As stated earlier, I have tried to explore the “lifeworld” of Bungamati by taking water as a starting point for the leads I followed, by collection of field data as well as in my search for information in different kinds of written documents.
From the settlement pattern of the Newars on the valley floor close to the rivers, the various water sources in the valley over the last century show the social and socio-religious value it occupies in the valley communities. The earning of religious merit by constructing water sources is seen in the numbers of fountains, wells and ponds that every little village, locality, as well as the greater towns and cities can boast of. Such constructions have not merely served the physical and religious needs of the people, but have also served as an important mine of information, art and culture of the bygone days. They bring about an understanding of people’s social life and activities, their beliefs and traditions captured in the inscriptions and work of art in these water sources, and legends surrounding them.

However, the dramatic changes in the social, cultural and economic systems in every nook and corner of the world have also been felt in the Kathmandu Valley. In the new system of socio-economic life, old and traditional water sources have disappeared except for those few with socio-religious importance. Patan city in Lalitpur district known as the “city of fountains” have little to uphold its name. The majority of the fountains fed by natural springs are diminishing in its capacity of water supply, and the most sacred rivers in the valley are in a pitiful state of degradation. Various renowned river *tirthas* of Bagmati and Vishnumati are just renowned names. The whole world is suffering under this global environmental change brought about by human interference. A recent 1998-1999 Report on freshwater resources cite the following disturbances in the current freshwater system: “Feeling the pulse of Water Resource Use Per-Capita water demands are increasing, and per capita water availability is declining due to population growth and trends in economic development”\(^3\). Population growth and economic development in the Valley have been foremost in the contamination of the rivers in the valley. The waters in the rivers and springs have diminished significantly; the rivers are contaminated primarily because its banks and water have become the trash bin of the city. The sacred Bagmati is no longer the devotee’s ideas place of holy bathing (except at its source I would imagine). Most towns and cities in the valley suffer from acute perennial water

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shortage. In such circumstances, gone are the concepts of using polluted or unpolluted water; even polluted river water is used for daily household purposes by all, irrespective of jat or economic status.

Water, the most important life support substance on the planet is magnified in its significance in the social and socio-religious life of Newars like no other substance in nature. However, it is amazing that hardly anyone has made any significant attempt either at the village, district or state level, to protect and safeguard this important substance. Everyone talks of contaminated holy rivers, yet no one contributes in terms of suggesting or championing non-polluting activities; not using these rivers and water sources as dumpsters is a must, if they are to survive. The polluted waters of tirthas like the Bagmati and Vishnumati has made even the most ardent devotee have second thoughts about bathing in its waters; if they do, they usually wash themselves with tap water after bathing in these places of tirthas.

The pollution in Bagmati River is so bad that an old lady aged 82 by the name of Maili Kamracharya (Paniko Purkeuli Gyan) made the following comment:

Ganagaji (referring to Bagmati River as incarnation of goddess Ganga) is made to carry the burden of the world; Gangaji could not speak and could not say ‘do not contaminate’ but quietly took the burden and disposals from the Cement factory, Carpet factory, and the houses, have rendered the water polluted and not drinkable. One time, we could drink water from this river; everyone used this water for various rituals. Today, everybody has forgotten Gangaji, very few come to worship and bathe even for religious purpose. Some older people come and wash their face, that is all. In certain ceremonial worship, sand from this river is needed. People come for such purposes even now but when they take the sand they wash the sand three to four times in the tap water before using for religious purpose. In the past people had good mind and the river was clean. Today, dharma must have left people’s mind and heart, that is why the river is dirty and no longer wanted or respected by the people. The river is only for the poor people today.”
GLOSSARY

Abhir: vermilion powder.
Achaju: Newar Hindu tantric priest.
Acha luyega: Consecration of a priest in Newari. Those Newars with Vajracharya fathers undergo the second initiation rite which make them eligible for acting as priests (household and tantric).
Acharya abhisheka: Consecration of a priest in Nepali.
Adhyaksa: Supervisor or Chief.
Aeyla: Alcohol, Spirit.
Adhiya: System of payment when the tenant pays the landlord half of the agricultural product.
Agam: Special sanctum.
Agam Chem: A house where digu deya is kept.
Agamdeyo: Secret deity tied to a patrilineal kin-group.
Aji: Grandfather, in Bungamati also referred to Bhairav in Bhairav jatra.
Aju: Grandmother, sometimes referred to Bhairavi.
Ajima: Grandmother goddesses, who are thought to reside at crossroads. They are propitiated at birth and death, and are regarded as malevolent, as they are thought to cause problems, particularly children’s diseases, if they are not propitiated.
Amrita: Potion of immortality in the form of water believed to be carried by gods.
Asan: Throne, a seat.
Astamatrika: Eight mother goddesses. They are also regarded as protected goddesses and their shrines are mostly located on the outskirts of the Newar settlement.
Atma: Spirit, Soul.
Bahah /Bahal: Residential compound, which is also regarded as a “monastery”.
Baidya: Medicine man
BareChhuyigu: Literally meaning to become a Bare. Initiation rites for the Sakya and Vajracharya boys.
Barha: The seclusion of girls in a dark room for twelve days before they reach puberty. It should be observed before the girls begin to menstruate.

Bhatta: Payment.

Bhoye chale jyupim: Those with whom one shares only feast food.

Bigha: Land Measurement approximately- 270x270 sq. ft.

Bu-Sakha: Hair cutting ceremony in Newari.

Bokshi/Boksha: Female/male practitioner of black magic.

Bhoye: Feast.

Brahmachari: Celibacy.

Buddha Margi: Followers of the path of Buddha.

Burha Janko: initiation rites of old age.

Bwala: Exchange labour.

Chaitiya: Buddhist monument raised by persons or institutions in order to gain religious merit.

Chalakh: Clever, shrewd.

Chhwasa Ajima: Crossroad female spirit.

Dahas: Natural pools.

Dasa Karma puja: Ten fold initiation rituals.

Devi: Goddess.

Devatas: Gods.

Deya Palas: Temple attendants.

Dhalpas: Caretakers of irrigation canal.

Dharma: Religious act of goodness.

Dhoknu: To bow down and touch the feet to show respect.

Dhungedhara: Fountains with stone waterspouts.

Digu Deya: Lineage deity.

Dobhano/Veni: The confluence of rivers.

Dooly: The traditional Newar Palanquin used for carrying deities and gods on the days of Jatra.

Dware: Village chief.

Gau-dan: Ritual offering of the cow to the dead.

Ganga jal: The holy water of the Ganges.
Garuda Purana: Hindu religious text used for death rituals.
Gairidhara: Deep fountains found in Nepal.
Gahiti: Deep fountain in Newari.
Ghar jwai: When a man lives in his wife’s house.
Ghats: Cremation ground.
Ghatta: Water mills.
Gorkha: The term refers to mountain Hindus, particularly from the present Gorkha and Lamjung districts. This term is ambiguous in itself. It may refer to inhabitants of the region surrounding Gorkha, the ancestral principality of the Shah dynasty, or to Nepalese soldiers in the national or in foreign armies.
Grahmin: Village.
Guthi: Derived from the Sanskrit word, ‘Gusthi’, meaning association. The term means a trust or an establishment, which manages and looks after religious property. In the Newar social organization Guthi is an association of a number of social groups on the basis of jat, kin and religion.
Guthiyar: A member who represents his household on Guthi Committee.
Gwala: Form of labour organization where affines or neighbours are called upon for help in the agricultural task. It is not very common these days.
Gubaju/Guruju: Buddhist Priest.
Hiti: Water fountain in Newari.
Homa: Fire sacrifice.
Ihi: Mock marriage of the young Newar girls to Sun god (Surya Narayan).
Ijat: honour.
Inara: Water Well in Nepali.
Ja chale jyupim: Those with whom one shares boiled rice.
Jaggawala: Landowner.
Jajaman: Employers of priest, sacrificer.
Jalsrot Ain: Water resource code of law.
Jana Andolan: People’s Movement.
Jati: The Sanskrit word for jat, lineage, race, etc. It is also used in Hindi, Nepali and Newari.
**Jatra:** Festival of taking gods/deities in a procession along the ritually demarcated route.

**Jyami:** Hired day labour.

**Kalas:** A vessel with narrow neck used mostly for worship.

**kaeta Puja:** Initiation rites of the Newar boys other than Sakyas and Vajracharyas.

**Kahan baja:** The long horned metal musical instrument used in various Newari ceremonies and festivals.

**Kamandalu/Tumbi:** Small jar like container used by the Yogis to carry holy water when travelling.

**Khas Kura:** Sanskritic language ancestral to Nepali spoken by the Indo-Aryan group of people in Nepal. Mostly referring to the language spoken by Brahman / Chhetri groups. It is the official language of Nepal.

**Khet:** Agricultural field.

**Kikimpa:** A crown like ornament representing Digu Deya (lineage deity).

**Kodali:** Short-handled hoe in Nepali.

**Kolla:** Brass vessel.

**Ku:** Short-handled hoe in Newari.

**Kul:** Clan.

**Kul Chem:** The oldest house of a clan.

**Kulo:** Irrigation canal.

**Kumari Lageko:** Suffering from a disease which is believed to have been caused by Kumari.

**Kundas:** They are natural pools mostly found nearer the sloping periphery of the Valley where springs feed them. Most of them are places of *tirthas*.

**Kwam:** Silver pots.

**Lah chale jyupim:** Those with whom water is acceptable or permitted.

**Lah chale majyupim:** Those with whom water is not permitted or water-unacceptable.

**Lohiti:** Fountain with stone waterspouts in Newari.

**Lulah:** Act of sprinkling water over the body in Newari.

**Maharajdhiraj:** King of Kings.

**Maha Bali:** The great sacrifice.

**Maha Naike:** Junior assistant.
**Maiti:** Natal home in Nepali.

**Makara:** A mythical water dragon images mostly found as carvings in watering places like fountains.

**Malpot:** Land Revenue.

**Mandala:** A kind of ritual symbol used for some complex rituals. It can be defined as an arrangement of deities conceived in sets of four, eight or sixty-four.

**Mandir:** Temples.

**Masan:** Large masonry platforms, usually circular for the purpose of cremating the dead.

**Matwali:** Referring to the alcohol drinking hill ethnic groups like Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu, etc.

**Mela:** Fair.

**Mohi:** Tenant.

**Mohi Lalpurja:** Tenant land ownership certificate.

**Mohini:** Ten days festival in autumn in honour of goddess Durga in Newari.

**Mohi Hak:** Right of the tenants to the land they cultivate.

**Mudras:** Ritual Dance performed by priests or temple attendants.

**Mukhiya:** Village chief.

**Muluki Ain:** Code of law.

**Muri:** Measurement scale, very seldom used now. 20 pathi = 1 muri.

**Nagar:** Town, City.

**Nagas:** Serpents worshipped as gods.

**Nagraja:** King of the serpents.

**Nagloka:** Abode of the serpents.

**Navaratri:** Ninth night of the festival of Durga in autumn (Dashain in Nepali and Mohini in Newari).

**Nilah:** Unpolluted water.

**Nini:** Father’s sister.

**Nisala:** Purifying the mouth by sprinkling water three times in the face in Newari.

**Nitya Puja:** Daily worship.

**Niyekus:** Machhendranath image painters belonging to high-caste Hindu Shresthas

**Paju:** Mother’s brother.
Pani bahek: Meaning expulsion or outcast from the society and cutting off water communication.

Pakho: Unirrigated field where rice is not cultivated.

Panejus: Machhendranath Temple priests or attendants.

Pap: Sin.

Paral: Straw.

Parbate/Parbatiya: Hill people, commonly referring to Brahman/Chhetri group.

Pathi: Measurement scale. 1 pathi = 8 mana; 1 mana=1/2 kg.

Phalca: Shelter, resthouses.

Phuki: Agnatic kinsmen.

Pithas: Open places for worshiping devis.

Pitri: Dead ancestors.

Pitri Tarpan: Offering of water to the dead.

Pokhari: Pond in Nepali.

Prajatantra: Democracy.

Prasad: Gift from gods. The food people offer in worship to god and receive part of it as a blessing.

Preta: Spirit of a dead person.

Pujari: One who worships. A priest.

Pukhu: Pond in Newari.

Purna Kalasa: A vessel filled with water and vegetation used in worship and any auspicious occasions.

Purohit: Household priest.

Raikar: Refers to land on which taxes are payable to the government, the state retaining the ownership.

Rath: Carriage.

Roops: Faces.

Ropani: Measurement of land in the valley. 1 ropani is approximately equal to 500sq m.

Sadhana: Empowerment and control over the divine.

Sana Guthi: A mourning society or association.

Sanad: Royal decree.
Saulah: Water fertilizer in Newari.
Shraddha: Offering of food (pindas) in death ritual.
Sila patra: Inscription on stones.
SivaMargi: Followers of the path of Siva.
Si Guthi: Death Association.
Stri jati: Female gender.
Sunpani: Water in which gold is dipped for purification purpose in Nepali.
Suwa: Jyapu ritual officiate.
Tagadhari: Those wearing sacred thread.
Teej: Women’s festival of fasting and merrymaking common among the Hindus.
Thachem: Natal home in Newari.
Thakali: The seniormost member in a guthi or a household.
Thakali Naikin: Wife of Thakali.
Thar: Lineage, family.
Thiye Majyupim: Untouchable caste.
Thiye Jyupim: Touchable caste.
Thon: Home made beer.
Tirthas: Pilgrimage spots.
Tole: locality or a small area unit in Nepali.
Tuu/ Tunthi: Well in Newari.
Twa: a small area unit, a locality in Newari.
Upa adhyaksa: Assistant Chief or Assistant Supervisor.
Upabhokta: User group.
Vahan: Vehicles, means of transport.
Vihara: Monasteries.
Vikshus: Monks.
Vrta: Fasting.
Yogin: Monks.
Zilla: District.
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