

Abstract

Among the Newars, the indigenous inhabitants of Kathmandu valley, rites of passage are a central part of society. Through this thesis I will explore the differences between youth and adults in the interpretation of rites of passages performed among the Newars. The following exploration will draw on The exploration will follow Turners methods of interpretation, including emphasis on local exegesis, and the role of social position in interpretation of ritual.

The unique feature of Newar society is the complexity of the co-existence between Buddhism and Hinduism. According to local exegesis there is no clear divide between the two religions, which is reflected in Newar social organization and through rites of passages. In this thesis three rites of passages will be described in detail, including comments and interpretations from adult participants. These display some of the flexibility between the two religions and establishes the foundation from where the differences between youth and adults in the interpretation of the rites of passages will be discussed. In particular, I examine the different ways in which youth and adult relate to the rules at play in the various rituals, as well as their articulation of the ritual purposes. In addition, I discuss generational differences in interpreting the rituals in relation to features of social organization, such as impurity (*jhuto*), social and ritual society (*guthi*), caste and seniority.

This thesis is based on research conducted through eight months in Kathmandu valley from December 2016 to August 2017. The fieldwork developed into two distinct phases. In the first half I was able to participate in various rites of passages and learn about Newar way of life while living with a Newar host family. The second phase involved closer contact with youth after relocating to a house where youth frequently spent time. A focus on the difference of meaning among the actors, and the identification of the different interpretations between youth and adults was an added value of using van Gennep and Turner to analyze the material.

Key words: Newar, rite of passage, youth, adult, interpretation, ritual rules, ritual purpose, social organization, religion

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मेरो नेपाली परिवार र साथीहरूलाई, तपाईंहरू सँधै मेरो हृदयमा एक विशेष ठाउँमा हुनेछ ।

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MAP OF THE KATHMANDU VALLEY



Figure 1: Map of Nepal and Kathmandu valley

*Now you go touch the cow dung
What did you just say, mom?
You have to touch the cow dung, your father is not here
But what good does it do?
You have seen your father do this so many times before
No, I don't want to!
Son, you go touch the cow dung
It's so unfair!
You are the oldest son, so it is your responsib...
... But I don't want to touch the cow poop!*

An Introduction to the Complexity of Newar Society

This thesis is not a study of youth as such. The purpose is to explore the differences between youth and adults in the interpretation of rites of passage performed and observed among the Newars of Kathmandu valley. The main argument will follow Turner (1967) and the meaning of ritual symbols which depends on a person's position in society. According to Bucholtz (2002), rites of passage are central in the understanding of youth in the same way as the role of the adult is important in the rite itself. Through the rites of passages, the youth get responsibilities which are to be upheld, even though they do not know the purposes of the ritual, as we have seen on page XI. Youth interact with the culture and produce culture rather than just waiting to transit into adulthood (ibid.). Social position of the youth and adults have a significant influence to the interpretation of the rites of passage. This comes to display by how one upholds ritual rules, the articulation of the purposes of a ritual, how one relates to impurity or practice religion and social organization such as caste and *guthi*. This may be one of the reasons why the cultural bearing adults are more loyal to the rituals and traditions than the youth.

This thesis will begin by with setting the basics for Newar society, their rites of passages, religion, and social organization. Following, methodological reflections will be given before taking a closer look at three different rites of passages, and lastly examine how youth and adult interpret the rituals differently.

1.1 Rites of Passage Through the Life of a Newar

Through the life of a Newar, rites of passages are a central part, from birth to and beyond death. Most of what is written about the Newars of Kathmandu valley social organization and religious beliefs. Rites of passage is surely a part of this, but has not been studied comprehensively, often as a part of a entirety (Gellner, 1988, 1992; Nepali, 1965; Sharkey, 2001; Toffin, 2007). Some studies have focused more on particular rituals or practices, for example tantric and monastic initiation rituals among the Buddhist (Gellner, 1988; Greenwold, 1974; Locke, 1975; Sharkey, 2001), girl's marriage to the *bel* fruit and seclusion and the cult of Kumari (Allen, 1975, 2000; Bennett, 1978). The most extensive work done solely on rites of passage among the Newars is

Gutschow and Michaels (2005, 2008, 2014). Their comprehensive ritual descriptions are detailed and give a good overview of the rituals from both a layman's and priest's perspective, at various locations throughout Kathmandu valley. Their approach on the other hand is quite different from my intention with this thesis as they dismiss the theories of van Gennep and Turner, saying that "functionalistic theories of this kind are insufficient to grasp the specific elements of such rituals" (Gutschow & Michaels, 2008, p. 7).

Through this dissertation I am going to interpret the rituals according to van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage and Turner's (1967) symbol theory where I will include local exegesis. I will focus on exploring the differences between the generations in the interpretation of the rites of passage and I have discovered that there is a considerable difference between youths and adults. The difference in social position between youth and adult in terms of social position is that adults are married and have children, they are established, while youth is everyone who has gone through the rituals and are not yet married. This differentiation will be discussed in further later in this chapter (see 1.3.6).

Numerous rituals have to be followed through five broad stages, namely birth, initiation, marriage, *janko* and death rites. In the series *Ethno-Indology*, Gutschow and Michaels have written three books to give an overview of the rites of passage among the Newars, namely *Growing up* (2008), *Getting Married* (2014) and *Handling Death* (2005). Gutschow and Michaels lists the various rites of passage and to get a clear understanding of the rituals and its chronology, the table on page four shows the different rites of passage through the life of a Newar (Gutschow & Michaels, 2014). Richards (1988) and Simonsen (2000) have both used this type of calendar of events to give an overview of the ritual sequences, which is a helpful tool to get an overview of the ritual chronology, as well as the different sequences through a ritual.

Birth rituals have many stages, and starts right after birth with purification of the child, mother and father, and is colloquially called *machabu benke*. After the birth purification there are various rites to be performed before the name-giving ceremony where the child receives its ritual name. This is called *namakarana*. The next big ceremony is the first rice feeding. The ritual is performed after five months for boys and six months for girls, which is for both sexes colloquially called *maca jakva*. This is also the time when many choose to perform *karnavedh*, which is the piercing of the ear lobes, which is not included in the list of life cycle rituals (Gutschow & Michaels, 2008).

The next rites of passages for the Newar children are the initiation for boys and marriage to the *bel* fruit for girls, including a seclusion for girls before their first menstrual cycle.

Initiation for boys is colloquially called *brata banda*, and is a ritual in which the Newar boy officially becomes a part of the lineage, as well as a member of the caste and *guthi* (see 1.3.2) (Gutschow & Michaels, 2008). *Brata banda* has to be performed before a boy can get married, but usually between the odd ages of three and eleven (ibid.). For the girls *ihi*, which is a ritual where pre-adolescent girls in odd years between the ages three till nine, are married to the *bel* fruit (*Aegle Marmelos*) which is a symbol of god Vishnu (ibid.). After this ritual is performed, the girl is seen as old enough to partake in daily household, such as cooking and performing *puja*. After *ihi* is performed, the ritual colloquially referred to as *bara* or *gufa* is performed. *bara* has to be performed before the girl's first menstruation, and involves a twelve-day seclusion and marriage to the sun which is a symbol of Lord Shiva on the twelfth day (ibid.). During the seclusion, the girl learns how to take care of herself as a mature woman, as well as becoming a sexual being.

The next rite is marriage, or *vivahan*. This is the union of the initiated boy and girl, and mark the two as fully adult. For the girl it is her third, and final marriage. (Gutschow & Michaels, 2014). Traditionally, marriage was arranged by the family, consulted by a *Yoshi*, the Newar astrologer. Arranging marriages is still common among the Newar, but at the same it has become more popular to find a partner in what is called love marriage (ibid.).

The next life cycle ritual for the Newar is *janko*. A Newar is believed to start a new life, that of a living god (Gutschow & Michaels, 2005). There is a total of four rituals called *janko*. Informants explained to me that the first ritual is performed at the age of 77 years and seven months and seven days, the second at 83 years and three months, or 1000 full moons, third at 88 years, eight months and eight days and the last at 99 years, nine months and nine days. An informant said the person observing the last *janko* is performing all life cycle rituals, and considered to be born again as a living god. These are not presented in the modern list of rites of passage.

When a Newar passes away he are cremated, as quickly as possible, usually the same day and the ritual sequences of *antyesti* starts. In addition to family being central in *antyesti* it is the *guthi* which organizes the ceremony. For the family there are many rituals to be performed during a grieving period of one year (Gutschow & Michaels, 2005). There are rites that has to be performed on the seventh, twelfth, and 45th day, as well as at six months and one year after death. Following this grieving period, one performs ancestor rites called *sraddha* each year on the death day to honor the deceased (ibid.).

Local name	English translation	Age	Sex
<i>Jata karma/ machabu benke</i>	Birth purification	0	Both
<i>Nabhicchedana</i>	Cutting umbilical cord	0	Both
<i>Chaithi</i>	Sixth day	Six days	Both
<i>Asauca</i>	Impurity	10 days	Both
<i>Namakarna</i>	Namegiving	3 months	both
<i>Anna prasana/ maca jakva</i>	First rice feeding	5/6 months	Male/female
<i>Chudacarna</i>	First head shave	5-9 years	Male
<i>Kayta puja/ brata banda</i>	Initiation to caste and <i>guthi</i>	3-11 years/ Before marriage	Male
<i>ihi</i>	Marriage to the <i>bel</i> fruit	3-11 years	Female
<i>bara-tayegu/ bara</i>	Seclusion	9-13 years	Female
<i>Vivahan</i>	Marriage		
<i>Antyesti</i>	Death ritual		

Figure 2: Calendar of life cycle rituals among the Newar

1.2 Introducing Newar Religion

Religion has played a central role in social organization and rites of passage, as well as civilization, throughout the Himalayas, and Hinduism and Buddhism have long been the two major religions of Kathmandu valley (Fuller, 2004). The two religions have the same origin, but while Buddhism died out in India decades ago, it kept flourishing amongst the Newars in Nepal in a complex co-existence with Hinduism (Gellner, 1992). The Newars have parallel rites of passage and therefore, whichever religion one belongs to, there is a ritual equivalent in the other religion. I will now give a brief overview of the two religions, and its main form of worship *puja*, and the discussion about if this co-existence is an example of syncretism, or if the focus should be on something else entirely.

1.2.1 Hinduism

Hindus are polytheistic, which mean that they believe in or worship many deities (Fuller, 2004). In Hinduism it is said that there are 330 million gods, but there is a fluidity, which means that

one deity can become many, and many deities can become one, this is the most important characteristic of polytheism in Hinduism. Vishnu and Shiva are the two main gods, who have different avatars or incarnations that are worshiped. For the Newar boy the initiation *brata banda* is where he accepts Hinduism as his religion.

There is no absolute distinction between deity and human beings, as all human beings possess the godly power *shakti*, but the characteristic that separates the deities and the human beings is that deities are immortal and humans must die (ibid.). An informant explained that all human beings inhabit god in the form of *shakti*, and therefore if one steps on another human being one has to show respect to and honor them, because one has indirectly stepped on god. Honoring the deity comes from the human ideas that when a guest arrives, one must attend to their needs. But in the case of deities, they do not have the same needs as human beings, and it's rather about honoring a guest rather than a response to the needs of the deity: "Gods dine in our love, not our food" (Fuller, 2004. p. 71).

1.2.2 Buddhism

Buddhism is a world religion in the sense that it has been able to adapt itself to a variety of social systems, and that it manages to exist in places where the *sangha*, the initiated order of monks and nuns, does not have roots (Bechert, 1984). The Newar men from the high castes Vajracarya or Shakya get initiated to the *sangha* through rites of passages, although among the Newars the *sangha* is not the central part of Buddhist practice (ibid.). Buddhism has a goal of reaching salvation, and this goal is for the individual to aim at and reach, and is essentially independent of culture (Gombrich, 1984).

Tantric practices came to Nepal and Kathmandu valley during the beginning of the first millennium C.E. (Sharkey, 2001, p. 5). Tantra refers to a ritual system within Buddhism which is thought to be the fastest and most effective way to reach salvation (Lienhard, 1984). It does, however, impose a different status system compared to earlier Buddhism, and the result is a blurred line between monk and laymen. Among the Newars this has taken even a step further, where there are initially no monks, only tantric masters (ibid.). In order to understand Newar Buddhism, it is important to understand its own terms and within what context it occurs, as well as within its own context of ideology and institutions, and, as Locke says: "prior to judgements about what constitutes Buddhism" (Locke, 1989, p. 267). Further, what Locke refers to as the uniqueness of Newar Buddhism is related to the fact that it is embedded in a predominant Hindu society (ibid.). Kathmandu is also a small geographic area, which Lienhard refers to as special in this context (1984).

If we look back at the origin of Buddhism, it developed in India, which is also a Hindu society, but it developed within a vast area which made the *sangha* able flourish on its own and establish monasteries and followers in areas less influenced by the surroundings of Hindu society (ibid.).

1.2.3 Performing *puja*

Puja is the core ritual in, but not exclusive to, Hinduism (Fuller, 2004), and is central in performing rites of passage. As it can be performed by both a priest and laymen, it is by heart the reception of an adored and distinguished guest. All *puja* have the same fundamental structure and can refer both to the periodic festivals and daily rituals, as well as rites of passage. However, to clarify, *puja* will from now on be referred to the single act of worship, be it in festival, rites of passages or on a daily basis. During my fieldwork I observed *puja* being performed in various forms: morning *puja* in the house, when preparing a meal, at various temples, during a wedding ceremony and rites of passage, and at public festivals. When domestic *puja* is performed it is to protect the household, whilst in private temples, it can be to benefit a specific group, be it family, caste or neighborhood. When performed by a priest in the temple it is for the prosperity of the society or the world. The extent of the elaboration of the ritual can vary drastically, depending on the resources such as time and money invested in the ritual. Though *puja* may be seen as a Hindu practice, there is certainly in Newar Buddhist who performs *puja* as part of their everyday life (Sharkey, 2001).

There is also a flexibility between the two religions, and Fürer-Haimendorf (1956) explains it well:

Most of the important Hindu deities are recognized as 'protectors' of Buddha and his doctrine, and their cult forms part of the ritual performed at the great Buddhist shrines. Similarly, Hindu temples are open to Buddhist worshippers, and at the great annual feasts Buddhist and Hindu Newars co-operate in the same ritual activities. (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, p. 18)

Through the rites of passages among the Newars, there is certain flexibility between the religions. The father of a girl observing the *bara* explained that they are themselves Hindu, but used a Buddhist monastery for the seclusion of the girl. This will be discussed further in chapter three and four.

1.2.4 Syncretism or co-existence?

Seeing religion in terms of a clear divide [...] ignores the fact that Hinduism and Buddhism grew out of a shared cultural and religious background. (Whelpton, 2005, p. 3)

Syncretism represents one of the more controversial categories in the study of religion, much because it was used to imply inauthenticity and represented impurity of religions, traditions and symbols, as they were borrowed from another set of beliefs (Leopold & Jensen, 2014; McGuire, 2002). Syncretism is a term that can be interpreted in many ways. McGuire (2002) defines the term as “The interweaving of new meanings with the older meaning system; blending diverse cultural elements into one religion.” (McGuire 2002, p.35). Allan (2004) divides the term into two categories. *Contact syncretism*, refers to blending of symbols or rituals from one religion to another, whereas *internal syncretism*, involves reallocating powers and characteristics *within* a religion (Allan, 2004, p.116). Nonetheless, the anthropological assessment of syncretism has an effect on the objects of study. The term has usually been applied to someone else’s religion or culture. As Stewart says:

Granted that we can recognize two different cultural or religious traditions in a given social field, how can we ascertain that they have indeed mixed rather than simply stand juxtaposed to one another? In brief, how can we differentiate syncretism from religious pluralism? (Stewart, 1999, p. 56).

Whether syncretism is aimed to determine the purity or the mixedness of a specific social group or religion, it a term given to a group from the anthropologist, so how can one determine what is a product syncretism?

As we now have seen, the Newars are traditionally divided into either Hinduism or Buddhism, but the complexity of their co-existence exceeds this simple division. The only ones confused are the outside observers who are used to seeing earlier and simpler forms of Buddhism which flourish today in a non-Hindu society (Locke, 1989, pp. 266-267). The topic and discussion about the relationship between the two religions, and questions about whether or not they are subject to syncretism, have been a much debated topic in the research about the Newars.

If it is accepted that culture is not a stable structure successfully transmitted across generations, but rather the result of any particular moment, of historical and social processes that both deform and confirm “structure” [...] then *syncretism* can be used within this theoretical framework to focus attention precisely on accommodation, contest, appropriation, indigenization, and a host of other dynamic intercultural and intracultural transactions. (Stewart, 1999, p. 56)

Newar Buddhism is often criticized for being a Hindu-Buddhist hybrid. One common phrase used to highlight this complexity is best expressed by a quote by David Gellner: “If you ask a Newar if they are Buddhist or Hindu, they will simply answer ‘yes’” (Gellner, 1992, p. 41). The two religious groups have never antagonized each other to any obvious extent; only mutual integration has taken place (Bista, 2000). Locke (1989) says that this is the result of Newar Buddhism being embedded in a dominant Hindu society in Kathmandu valley, and confirms that the uniqueness of Newar Buddhism does not come from the idea that it is so mixed with Hinduism, as it often has been said. He argues that the Newar Buddhist have a clear idea about what their religion contains and are therefore not subject to syncretism.

1.3 Elements of Newar Social Organization

As we now have seen, the unique features of Newar society is the complexity of the religious co-existence which is also reflected in the Newar social organization. A common view is that the religious co-existence comes to display through caste and *guthi*. In this part I will give a brief overview of these two forms of social organization among the Newars to give a background for the Newar context, and why they are important to consider when talking about rites of passage. I will in addition explain the term *jhuto*, which refers to impurity, before considering sex, age and family as an important element of the social organization.

1.3.1 Caste: A Social Hierarchy

Newar society is a patrilineal society where caste is inherited from father to son (Gutschow & Michaels, 2008). Through rites of passage this transition is constituted and enforced. Caste among the Newars is unique because both the Buddhist and the Hindus are embedded in one single caste system (Gellner & Quigley, 1995). This is not found elsewhere in Asia, and is derived from the complexity of the two religions in Newar society. The caste system is two

headed with two competing branches priestly castes and a shared stem of castes belonging to either Hindu or Buddhist religion. In total there are 64 castes that indicates you if your occupation is *jhuto* or not (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956; Gellner, 1986). Among the pure castes or the high castes, called Brahman on the Hindu side and Vajracarya and Shakya on the Buddhist side have all equally high status as a priestly caste (Gellner, 1986). The Brahmans and Vajracarya function as ritual and family priests and are used for example for the *brata banda*.(Chattopadhyay, 1924; Toffin, 2007) While for other rituals there is a priest from a specific temple that is the priest for one certain ceremony, such as *ihi* (Gellner, 1988). The Shakya are former monks, now working primarily as gold smiths, as well as they are initiated into the *sangha* community (Allen, 1973, 1987; Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956). The duties to this includes taking being the temple priest in the temple to which they belong(Gellner & Pradhan, 1995; Gellner & Quigley, 1995; Greenwold, 1974). As pure caste, but under the high priestly castes, who under the umbrella term is called *Sudras*, are all considered as clean castes (Toffin, 2007). Among these castes, the division into either Hinduism or Buddhism is a blurred line. The occupations of the Sudras are farmers and other clean occupations such as potters and iron-smiths, oil pressers and funeral priests, and have a servant status, except for the *Shrestha*. This is the largest caste of the Sudras, and traditionally occupy a more noble and ruling position, and can be said to have more of a white-collar occupation (Gellner, 1986). Within the impure castes there are two other sub-categories of castes, unclean, and untouchable (Allen, 1987). Unclean castes have occupations like butchers and death ritual specialists, while the untouchables are cleaners and sweepers (ibid.). These castes have the lowest status and are excluded from entering various temples, markets and restaurants (Höfer, Heinze, Höfer, & Heinze, 1981; Khare, 2006; Levine, 1987; Rosser, 1966).

In contrast to caste as known from India, there is no distinct rule of caste exogamy among the Newars (Allen, 1987). Among the Newars, inter-caste marriage depend upon the two castes it may concern (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1957). With the example of the two Buddhist high castes, Vajracarya and Shakya, inter-caste marriage happens without anyone raising an eyebrow (ibid.). Intermarriage between castes that are far more distinct from each other's social status is also permissible, but implies that if a man of high caste marries a girl of a considerably lower caste, he will lose his high status and caste due to, for example, that he does not eat ritually pure food (ibid.).

1.3.2 *Guthi*: Social Camaraderie

Newar society has, in addition to caste, a grouping called *guthi* and its main purpose is to maintain the socio-economical order of Newar society, and its tasks to handle death rites amongst its members and maintenance of temples, roads and other public areas (Gellner, 1986). Bista (2000) mentions there are three types of *guthi*: religious, public service and social *guthi*. A Newar family can be members of more than one type of *guthi*. The membership of the religious and public service *guthi* is compulsory and inherent, while the social *guthi* is based on voluntary participation and is organized such that the duties rotate. (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956). The *guthi* system is therefore integrated into the social structure of the community and hence was not only successful but also highly sustainable (Locke, 1989). It is a system like no other in the world and can be highlighted as a model of a system that worked not only to preserve tangible but also intangible aspects of culture within Kathmandu valley (Gellner, 1992).

The *guthi* is a patrilineal organization in which men are the primary member. The members of a certain group can represent different castes and religions (Bista, 2000). Men get initiated into the *guthi* when observing the *brata banda*, while women follow their fathers *guthi* before marriage and later her husband's. This cannot be reversed, even in case of divorce, and even though the woman returns to her natal home, the *guthi* of her ex-husband has to organize the cremation when she passes away (Gellner & Pradhan, 1995).

1.3.3 *Jhuto*: Impurity

Every person has a certain type of *jhuto*, a type of pollution that would sully anything touched with the lips or hands. (Pfarrkirchner, 2012, p. 66)

In Nepal, the idea of *jhuto* manifests in merely every culture and ethnicity, Newars included. The term *jhuto* can be translated to meaning impure, contaminated and polluted *jhuto* applies to many aspects of life, but four categories stand out; birth, death, eating/drinking and menstruation. Douglas explores the cultural notion of dirt and its symbolic meaning in *Purity and Danger* (2003). Douglas explain dirt following Durkheim's definition as matter out of place, and pairs this with the distinction between sacred and profane (ibid.). Unlike previous notions in anthropology, the distinction between the sacred and the profane did not disappear in modern times, but rather manifested itself in the *secular* terms clean and unclean. This is

displayed through the perception of what constituted as contamination. This makes the symbolic meanings of contamination socially dependent and thus relative (ibid.), and we could argue that *jhuto* is a cultural matter determined by actual and symbolic markers. This will be explored further in chapter 4.

1.3.4 Gender Roles

The term *gender* means the cultural difference of women from men, based on the biological division between male and female (Connell, 2013, p. 8).

In Nepal there is a clear separation of social roles by gender (Kai, Saito, & Gautam, 2007). The social and cultural norms that treat social behavior and networks are fundamentally different for men and women (ibid.). While men's social roles are centered on social networks, women's social roles are concerned and restricted to the domestic life of the household (ibid.). As an informant said:

Newar girls think it is important to follow the traditions, and they are good at it. Just look at our friends, no Newar girls hang out with us because they are at home doing their traditions. They make food and do *puja* every day.

This confirms the initial suggestion, that Newar women traditionally educate their children in the religious life, and are responsible for the religious activities at the level of the household. Paul and Wilson (1985) mention the religious needs of women and that they are often grounded in emotions and dependence on others. Traditional role of women in religion, as well as in society, is the maternal role (Repstad, 2000). The basic socialization, upbringing, and education of children are seen as the key responsibilities. As Nepal is a patrilineal society, the lineage follows the man (Allen, 1987; Gellner & Pradhan, 1995). When a man gets married his wife gets initiated and accepted into his lineage and *guthi* (Gutschow & Michaels, 2014). The man is then responsible for the socio-economic position of his wife and any children they might have together (Bennett, 1983).

1.3.5 Family Structures

In Nepal is a patrilineal society, and the wife becomes a part of her husband's family when they marry (Allen, 1987; Gellner & Pradhan, 1995). The composition of the family is quite complex in Nepal (Nepali, 1965). There are three distinct sub-types. The first type is called *nuclear family* and contains husband, wife and children (Ortner, 1978). The second is *immediate family*, consisting of the parents living with a married son and other unmarried children or a man living with his unmarried brothers and sisters (Nepali, 1965). The last sub-category is the *joint family* where the members of the household include for example parents and their married son, his wife and their children. Any brothers or sisters of the father with their respective family may also be a part of the same household (ibid.). These are all equally spread out in Nepal, but an emphasis on the *joint* family makes it the preferential living situation (ibid.).

In addition to the various kinds of family organization, *tway* is a term which refers to unrelated friends, or fictive kin, and is common throughout the different ethnic groups of Nepal (Gellner & Quigley, 1995). It is common for friends, neighbors and friends of the family to refer to each other as brother and sister with specific inclination if it is older or younger brother or sister, uncle, aunt, and on which side of the family one belongs to (ibid.). My informants would refer to each other by family terms, such as an older male friend would be *daai*, or a younger female friend would be *bahini*.

1.3.6 Youth, Adults and Seniors

For the purpose of this thesis it is important to talk about the different generations. In this section I will give the reader the basis for each of the three categories and how they relate to each other, starting with youth, through adults and ending up with seniors. Thereafter, some reflections about youth culture and its manifestation as a period where the youth are prone to negotiate their position and culture.

The studies of youth culture among anthropologists have until now been scarce. This can be due to the fact that the category *youth* is quite new (Bucholtz, 2002). In this perspective, most studies of youth have been with regards to the study of rites of passage. The focus has then been on the individual entering into adulthood, and downplaying youth as a significant stage. Bucholtz (2002) says that anthropologist should take a closer look at youth, as anthropology has the ideal method and is well situated to take account of this cultural production and negotiation of cultural forms (ibid.).

First of all, through this thesis the term youth refer to people generally between the age 20 and 32 years old. This derives from the local understanding of when people are young, implying the period between rites of passages and before marriage and having children. Throughout the world there are different definitions of whom is considered to be youth (Dalsgaard & Hansen, 2008). For example, in Brazil, youth refer to a person of both sexes from the age of 15 up to 29 years old, whereas in Vietnam the notion of youth is from 15 to 35 years old, while the UN defines youth as people between the age of 15 and 24 (UN, 2001). Deutsch and Jones (2008) argues that this period is when youth are trying to find themselves while also keeping their supportive ties, and Arnett (2001) agrees by saying that this age period offers the best opportunities for self-exploration. Thus, youth define adulthood through life experience (ibid.). Fadjukoff, Kokko, and Pulkkinen (2007) mention five criteria for reaching adulthood, primarily used in the West, which to some extent can be used for the Newar. These are “(a) leaving the parental household, (b) onset of marriage or cohabitation with a chosen romantic partner, (c) onset of childbearing and parenting, (d) completion of schooling, and (e) entering the labor force in a full-time job” (Fadjukoff et al., 2007, p. 506). According to Schlegel and Barry (1991), in most traditional cultures the focus of the transition from adolescence to adulthood is through marriage. Arnett has in addition found three criteria which youth emphasize: responsibility of self, independence over decision making and financial independence (Arnett, 2001).

I think any mother and father, not just in Nepal, but across countries and cultures, can agree that youth tend negotiate their position. Arnett and Fowler (1999) address this and explain that youth are trying to find their place in society and figure out how who they are by gaining life experience. Since the relationship between the resistance of culture, its authenticity and cultural appropriation can be very complex, one should pay attention to the local meaning of these practices (Bucholtz, 2002).

In Nepal, there is great emphasis on the importance of seniors and adults are seen as cultural bearers, much because of their prominent role through rites of passage. Gellner (1992) explains that the authority in the household lies with the senior male and his wife, which again passes to the oldest son when one of them passes away. Fürer-Haimendorf (1956) adds that there is no institution which passes the unilineal succession from father to son. The authority and the respect that comes with it manifests in various ways, but two stand out, and are quite explicit. Firstly, during a feast, or *bhoj*, the placements of where people are seated is arranged after seniority, first men, then women (Gellner, 1992). Secondly, one can show respect to the seniors by bowing to them. The rules are complicate for when to bow and who to bow to. This

may be one of the reasons why it is mostly practiced during formal occasions. In everyday life an inclination of the head is often sufficient (ibid.). On occasions such as rites of passages, the senior most male and his wife of the *guthi* to which the novices belong to are invited (Toffin, 2007).

1.4 Analytical Terms and Concepts

According to van Gennep (1960) rites of passage can be recognized by three sets of rites that are performed: *Rites of separation* is the first rite where one gets separated from the social status that one belongs to, also called a *pre-liminal state*. The second is *rites of transition*, the *liminal phase*, when one belongs to neither ones' previous social status, nor ones coming social status. The last of the rites is the *rites of incorporation*, where one is initiated into ones new social status, and is called the *post-liminal phase*. Van Gennep's (1960) main argument is that rites of passage are the transition from one social status to another, and the combination of these three rites makes the initiation ritual. As we will explore further in the chapter three and four, during the *bara*, the girls' social status is transformed from pre-sexual to sexual being.

During the transition rites, the individual undergo rites of differentiation, be it permanent or temporary. Mutilations in the form of tattooing, circumcision or perforating the ear are means of permanent differentiation, while dressing in certain clothes or the cutting of hair is temporary. Initiation rites are often concerned with the social puberty of the individual. Earlier, these rites were often referred to as puberty rites, but it usually does not correspond with physical puberty, and van Gennep (ibid.) therefore argues that these rites should not be called puberty rites for this reason. Even though the rites of initiation are independent from puberty they can still be of sexual nature and have rites that encourages fertility in the future. It is also an incorporation into adult society. Among the Newars, *bara* has this function, as it is performed before the girl starts her first menstruation, in other words before her physical puberty, and my informants explained that this ritual was for fertility.

The rite of incorporation is the welcoming to the new social status. As will be discussed further in chapters to come, through *bara* the girl is welcomed back to the house where she lives as a married woman, and cannot enter unless a certain ritual is performed.

As a permanent social union, marriage, which involves more than the union of the man and the woman. It evokes change not only in the life of the individual, but within the family, clan, caste and/or village. For this reason, van Gennep (ibid.) says that marriage is the most

important transition rite. For the individuals it is a permanent incorporation into a new environment, and the change in the individuals' condition and specific status is marked.

According to Turner (1967), a symbol is something regarded as a natural representation of something that possesses certain, generally accepted, features or associations through facts or thought. To identify a symbol, one has to acknowledge three different kinds of data: outer perceptible forms of the symbol, the local exegesis, and the interpretation of the anthropologist. Predominant in Turners (ibid.) symbol theory is dominant symbols. These are the unification of the polarized meanings as a multireferential symbol. The dominant symbols tend to be the focus of interaction during the ritual because their high consistency within the framework of meaning-content, and its association with purpose and means-to-end relationship. We will see during *ih* that the *bel* fruit is multireferential and its meaning-content is indeed of high consistency. These characteristics make the dominant symbol adaptable to analysis and their goals in which ritual they occur in and the cultural framework. The observers' behavior does not affect the fact that the symbol is dominant, whether the meaning is explicitly formulated implied. Further, Turner (ibid.) says that symbols are involved in social processes and becomes a factor in social actions. There is no social organization without rituals, and a symbol possesses traits of ritual behavior. Here we can draw parallels to the *kanyadaan* during *ih* where the *bel* fruit is used in the performance, and the girl is handed over from the father to the daughter (see chapter 3).

As seen in Audrey Richards' *Chisungu* (1988), one can ask what is achieved when performing a ritual and the answer will be the expressed purpose of the ritual. Richards claims that the nature of rituals call for a multitude of possible explanations for ritual behavior, and these again can have individual variations within a ritual. The ideas that are generally accepted by the people performing the ritual seem to be dramatically represented, and other ideas may be under-communicated (ibid.). What was communicated from my informants as the main event of the *brata banda* was when the boy changed from the loin cloth to underwear, and that this meant that they were now mature.

The purpose of the performed ritual can be short-ended or long-termed. To perform a ritual to make it rain would here be a short-ended ritual, whilst to pray to the gods for a long and happy life is a long-term purpose for rituals. Rituals may have a number of different motives that can serve as primary and secondary purposes of the ritual. When a young Newar girl is married to the *bel* fruit, the primary purpose of the ritual is to give her a good upbringing and educate her to be able to participate in the household. The secondary purpose, as an additional

benefit from performing this ritual, can be to display the conditions for upbringing, in other words, to display ones' social status.

Rituals being governed by rules is one of the main theoretical themes in *Day of Shining Red* (Lewis, 1980). The ritual in itself is difficult to define, but according to Lewis is defined when the observer and performer acknowledges their actions as ritual (ibid.). This derives from the idea that rituals have a peculiar fixity that it is bound by clear and explicit rules which dictates the order and sequence of the ritual performance (ibid.). This may explain why my informants often discovered rituals being performed out in the streets or in the neighborhood just as they happened, even when the ritual might be performed far away from where they were situated (ibid.).

Lewis says that ritual is practical and guided action. This is understood as ritual actions are guided by certain rules (ibid.). In many cases the knowledge of these rules may be implicit. One's proper partaking in a certain ritual demands this implicit knowledge for performance. Lewis also emphasizes the necessity of rules, and says that if there are no rules the performer has to follow, the action taking place cannot be a ritual. As people are aware that their ritual actions are guided by rules, this often becomes the topic of conversation during the ritual. One prominent example of this became apparent during *ihī*, where the mothers guided their daughters in performing *puja* with instructions from the priest. When they were uncertain, they often asked others what to do, and others in turn asked them back.

The use of an everyday object or action, composed in such a way it is not recognized, implying an underlying meaning is what Lewis calls instrumental rationality (ibid.). It is from not immediately understanding what the meaning of the particular action which defines the ritual (ibid.). Recognition of ritual relates to the fact that the purpose of the action and its instrumentality is not apparent (ibid.). This instrumental rationality may cause different interpretations of the action performed and assign it more significant symbolic meaning than what is intended, that there is something with this action or object that must communicate something which is not apparent (ibid.).

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A Researcher's Quest for the Undiscovered

Kathmandu valley is a place where cultures and religions meet in a systematic chaos, and it was here fieldwork was carried out over eight months from December 2016 to August 2017. It developed as two distinct phases which came to characterize my analysis of the differences in interpretation between actors. In the beginning I stayed with a Newar host family, which gave me insight Newar way of life as well as cyclic festivals, family happenings. In the beginning of May 2017 I decided to move to Patan in a second attempt to access women's ritual life, but what I found was the generational differences between youth and adults in the interpretation of rites of passages.

In this chapter, I will discuss the fieldwork with respect to the choices I made, and on what basis, how I worked with my material and how I got access to the field. I will start by presenting my motivation and personal interest for doing research in Kathmandu, and the chronology of the research, my experiences as a first-time researcher and how I collect data material and document the rites of passages which is the background for this thesis. In the end I will give an overview of how I worked with the material while in field through interpretive method with focus on Turner (1967) and give some reflections about research ethics.

2.1 Where Cultures and Religions Meet

Nepal's position in the Himalaya between the two powerful countries India and China, and the trading route was an important aspect in the development of Kathmandu valley, and Nepal (Shrestha, 2012; Whelpton, 2005). Actually, the history of Nepal comes from the history of Kathmandu valley (Nepali, 1965; Whelpton, 2005), as the history of Nepal dates back to the 4th century, and what was referred to as Nepal was in fact Kathmandu valley (ibid.). The three major cities that constitute Kathmandu valley is the former kingdoms Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur (Whelpton, 2005) and count the highest number of Newar residents (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2014). Kathmandu valley has a population of approximately 2,7 million residents, and almost a third of the population is Newar (ibid.).

2.2 My First Discovery of Kathmandu Valley

Nepal has always been a country of interest for me. It has always seemed like this mystical land far away up in the hills of the Himalaya. I remember uncle Pål telling stories from when he had gone to Nepal to trek up to Everest base camp, and it fascinated me to listen to his stories about the people and the environment. This led me to pursue Nepal during my bachelor, and I was able to spend a year as an exchange student at Kathmandu University in 2014/2015. I studied Tibetan Buddhism and Nepali language at the department of Buddhist and Himalayan studies, called Rangjung Yeshe institute. The experience of how easily this diversity in ethnic groups, cultural heritage, religion and languages functions and co-exists, intrigued me to pursue fieldwork in Kathmandu. A class attended called “Anthropological study of Nepalese religion” gave me an insight into Newar culture and religion. My teacher in this class was Fr. Gregory Sharkey who has been studying Newars for almost 30 years. His endless knowledge about the Newars inspired me to explore this part of the Nepali culture myself, and was the inspiration for this research.

During my stay in Kathmandu valley as an exchange student I stayed in a Tibetan-Buddhist area in the suburbs of Kathmandu, called Boudhanath. In addition to get to know the area and my neighbors, I had the opportunity to travel around Kathmandu valley to explore and discover new places and get to know different aspects of Nepali culture. This became a great asset when planning and executing fieldwork, as I was familiar with many different areas and what I could expect when arriving.

My year as an exchange student ended quite dramatically. April 25th 2015 a magnitude 7,8 earthquake on Richter’s scale struck Nepal and killed nearly 9.000 people. (Galetzka et al., 2015). It was a Saturday and there was no school for me and my class mates. I was in Kathmandu with five friends when the earthquake struck. Without really grasping what had really happened the six of us got safe back to Boudhanath where we got more information from the school. During the next couple of days, I stayed outside on a tennis court under a tarp with Isabelle and Johanna who were in my Nepali class. All in all, we were quite lucky, and we felt safe. A friend of ours that had just left Nepal arranged for plane tickets to leave after three days to India. It was quite a bizarre feeling to experience how privileged we were, us three European girls. After all, we could just leave to go back home to our earthquake-free homes in Europe, and had the choice if we wanted to go back or not. On many occasions I regretted leaving when I did, as I wanted to stay and help out, any way I could. It made the decision to go back to Nepal for doing research a lot easier.

2.2.1 Language barriers

I knew before returning to Kathmandu that my Nepali skills were rudimentary, and had decided to have a Nepali language teacher. A Norwegian researcher I met during my exchange year had a great teacher which she recommended me to contact. My teacher was a 58-year-old Newar Buddhist woman, and she had many years of experience as a language teacher, she had also been working as a research assistant, specializing in Newar Buddhism, where she worked for organizations such as the Peace Corps. We decided to do two lessons a week for a while and that we would talk about my research, so I would get familiar with the vocabulary and be able to understand conversations with informants about topics such as rituals and culture. In many cases, the lessons turned in to semi-structured interviews where I would ask her about things I was wondering about, either things in general or tied to events I had participated in.

As mentioned, Nepal is very diverse – ethnically, linguistically and religiously, and there are multiple languages spoken. In fact, there are more than 92 languages spoken throughout Nepal, but Nepali is the official language (Yadava, 2009). From studying Nepali at Rangjung Yeshe Institute I acquired basic language skills in Nepali, both spoken and written. It is also worth mentioning that the Newars have their own language, Newar (Gellner, 1986; Nepali, 1965; Sharkey, 2001; Toffin, 2007; Whelpton, 2005). The two languages are fundamentally different, where Newar derives from Tibeto-Burman language, and Nepali from Indo-Aryan (Whelpton, 2005). My plan was to take into consideration the neighborhood and potential host family whether or not I would do a Newar language course, but what I experienced was that most people I encountered spoke English confidently and that most conversations and interviews would be held in English, and that my Nepali would be sufficient for interacting and to have conversations with people where English was not sufficient. For this reason, I chose neither to Newar language course nor use an interpreter. In conversations where I would need an interpreter, it would often seem obtrusive, for example when women would sit outside by the temple and talk about what is going on in the neighborhood and gossip about ones not present. Borchgrevink (2003) show different aspects and problematic areas of using an interpreter. His example of Berreman's using a high caste interpreter, which blocked information from low-caste informants, and limited the information from the informants of high-caste is instructive. Another implication when using an interpreter is the known idea about Lost in Translation. Many researchers have argued that it tampers with the validity of the research:

A threat arose when the researcher addressed a question in English to the interpreter, since the researcher did not know how the interpreter perceived and/or interpreted the question. Since research questions may not be value-free but may reflect the researcher's cultural values, there was a problem in relation to the interpretation of the questions. (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002, p. 54)

In addition, there is the worry about the question being translated in a different way than the researchers wished. There is also the matter of finding cultural equivalent vocabulary for the interpreter to convey underlying meaning of the answer from the interviewee (Peña, 2007). Another problem is that the researcher does not know if the interpreter is summarizing or modifying, rather than translating the responses (Kapborg & Berterö, 2002).

2.3 My Anthropological Discovery of Kathmandu Valley

My key informant when returning to Kathmandu was Isabelle. I came to know her during my year as an exchange student when we studied Nepali together at Rangjung Yeshe Institute. We were together during the earthquake, evacuating together and we had kept in touch while I was back in Norway. Isabelle is from England and has been living in Nepal since 2013, studying, working as a freelance writer and as a tattoo artist. She is well-educated and resourceful, and has a large network throughout Kathmandu. She had offered me to stay at her place for the first week or so in order for me to have time to settle and figure out my first move. During this time, she introduced me to many of her own friends who would later become important informants, and she functioned as the first individual that I would start building my network around. Goodman (1961) calls this the *snowball sampling*, and this would be an important methodological tool, not just with Isabelle as the first individual, but through various social arenas and contexts.

My plan for the first couple of weeks of my fieldwork was to find a host family. I got a tip from a friend about a page called www.homestay.com and started searching for a Newar family, and made a profile of my own informing about my plans to do research about Newars. Already the first day my profile was public, a 34-year-old Newar woman called Amita contacted me, and we decided to meet the next day. It was important for me to meet the family before making a decision on where to stay, not just so we would get along, but so I could explain to them my project and to ensure that they would be comfortable with me staying with them and them being a part of my research. We met at Amita's house in *Soracutte*, about 10 minute

walk from the tourist district Thamel in Kathmandu. The house was big, three stories, built in brick and painted orange, with a tall brick and steel fence around the premises, and I remember thinking that this was definitely a middle class house. She invited me in and we went up to the second floor where the kitchen and living room was, as well as the roof terrace. She told me that it was only her family living in the house (*nuclear* family) and showed me the room that was vacant, which was a private room on the first floor, next to their bedrooms. Usually she rents out two rooms to tourists, but at that time I would be the only one staying for a while. Amita continued by talking about her family. She is married to a Chhetri man called Deepak, who is 31 years old, and have two daughters, Nirupa and Lalita, who are nine and three years old. Amita was studying tourism at the time, as well as both herself and Deepak work from home. They have an office on the ground floor for their trekking business where they arrange for tourists to go trekking in the Himalaya. Deepak had been working with tourism for quite a while, and had on two occasions been to Europe with former clients. In addition to speaking English very well, they speak fluent Spanish, which makes their business well catered to Spanish speaking tourists. After the introduction, I was able to explain to her my purpose for coming to Nepal, and that I was going to do research on Newar women and their attitudes and identities in religious life. She immediately showed interest and before I was able to finish the introduction I had prepared she invited me to come to various family rituals and ceremonies. She was also completely fine with me doing research in their house, so I decided that I would stay with them, and moved in three days later.

I spent a lot of time with the family. In the morning I would take Nirupa to the school bus before eating lunch together with Amita and Deepak at home. Amita and I would sit next to each other on the kitchen table after lunch. She often had assignments for school or work for clients, and I was writing my fieldnotes. I would help with preparing food, both for lunch and dinner in the evening, and Amita taught me how to do the offering of food for the fire god. One of my main tasks after a meal became to take out the dirty dishes to the outside sink on the roof where the maid would clean them the next morning. On big family events I was invited to come with them, and we ended up going to *ihī*, *brata banda*, celebrate the color festival *holī*, and go to the wedding of Deepak's cousin. Because I participated in these events, and generally helped out in the home, playing with the children, and it became in many ways it was a process like for Briggs (1970) when she became adopted by the intuit family, I did not do everything perfectly. Amita and Deepak was very patient and they would, as well as their daughters, come to refer to me as a part of the family.



Plate 1: The house in Soracutte. Photo: the author

My initial intention for my fieldwork was to explore and document the diversity of women's ritual roles and activities in Newar Buddhism. I wanted to follow a sample of women in Kathmandu through their daily activities in the home, in the temples and in the neighborhoods. During the first months of the fieldwork I was able to participate in many family ceremonies, like *brata banda*, *ihī*, and *bara*, as well as four weddings, in which one was a Chhetri wedding. In addition to these, cyclic festivals were celebrated, such as the new year's celebration in Bhaktapur called *bisket jatra*, and *sindur jatra* in Thimi, just outside Bhaktapur. I was able to interview with women, and observe them during rituals, but other than Amita, I was not able to observe the daily life of any of my female informants. This led me to start doubting my project and I came to the conclusion that I had to change my approach. I had on various occasions been to Patan. I knew that this area is predominantly Newar Buddhist, and that the city structure was built on small communities and neighborhoods and natural meeting spots, there are lots of temples that women use frequently. One informant who lives in Patan said that it would be a great area to stay in, as there were lots of women that were active at *Kwa Baha*, the golden temple. It seemed like a good place to get in touch with the kind of informants I was seeking, and to be integrated into a Newar community.

I moved to Patan in the beginning of May 2017, approximately half way into my fieldwork. An informant I was introduced to by Isabelle rents out an apartment Patan in an old Newar house. The five story house has traditional wood carved windows and panels, and is built in red brick. I got a room in a shared apartment together with one Nepali man and a woman from India. The living room of the apartment was used as a hangout spot for the three of us living in there, as well as friends of Dinesh, the 28-year-old Newar man who was the landlord, and anyone who was around. I knew some of the people hanging out there briefly from before, and they welcomed me to their group and gave me tips about areas in Patan that would potentially be good for my project. We would often sit outside the house where we had a narrow view of the main street, and on occasion some of the people present would say that I should go check out the ritual that was going on out in the street or in a nearby temple, or talk to the neighbors about what was happening so I potentially could join a *janko* or the procession to a *brata banda*.

Kwa Baha would become the place I visited most. There I could sit and observe people entering, praying, and performing *puja*. Some people that saw me there many times and was interested in who I was and what I was doing, so we came to talk from time to time when I went to the temple. We would talk for a little bit while we were there, but they were too busy to meet later in the day or somewhere outside the temple. When I had told some of them about my

research project I was invited to partake in various ceremonies, but I might have faded away in their memory because I never got details about when or where to meet up, even when I tried contact them. This was a frequent experience of mine, and this lead me to become terribly frustrated. I tried and tried, but I did not get access! It ended up with me not going to the temple as often, but rather staying at the house, and hanging out with the people who was there.



Plate 2: Outside the house in Patan. Photo: Dinesh

I started to read through my research again, and after a while I realized that I actually had lots of material, and all of a sudden I discovered something I had not anticipated. The generational differences between the youth and the adults became apparent, which lead me to focus on Newar youth and adults and the difference in how they interpret the rites of passage, especially in relation to common topics of conversation like *jhuto*, religion, caste, ritual rules and the purposes of said rituals.

2.4 The Anthropologists' Tool Box

When observing it is important not to just rely on memory. This section will focus on my approach to documenting and take account of what I observed during my fieldwork, as well as choices I made in relation to preparing and planning interviews and to get a variety of informants and the role as a researcher.

2.4.1 Notebooks, sketches and photography

The main research tool for the anthropologist, is the anthropologist herself, but it is certainly not the only tool. Throughout the fieldwork I used notebooks in different categories to take down fieldnotes, sketches, questions and reflections. I had a diary which was my main platform to take notes. I also had a logbook where I documented briefly what I did each day, and books I used in interviews, preparing for different events and language classes. I filmed and took photos to document rituals and festivals. This came naturally as most people who participate in the rituals take pictures themselves, and there was almost always a hired photographer at rites of passages. To complement these videos and pictures, jotting was a preferred method (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). I would write details of the ritual, names of objects, contact information and other information that participants talked about.

Anthropologists use a combination of participant observation and interviews during the fieldwork, and my fieldwork was no exception to this (Briggs, 1986). Preparing for interviews started when writing out fieldnotes, even before I knew who to interview. I used lots of post-it notes on which I wrote what questions were unanswered when writing out my notes. When the interview questions were finished I contacted informants and had asked they were willing to partake. Problems concerning setting the dates for interviews was mainly that people had little time, or that they straight up did not answer when calling them. At last I had to just show up where I knew they would be and ask if they had some time to spare. Usually this worked.

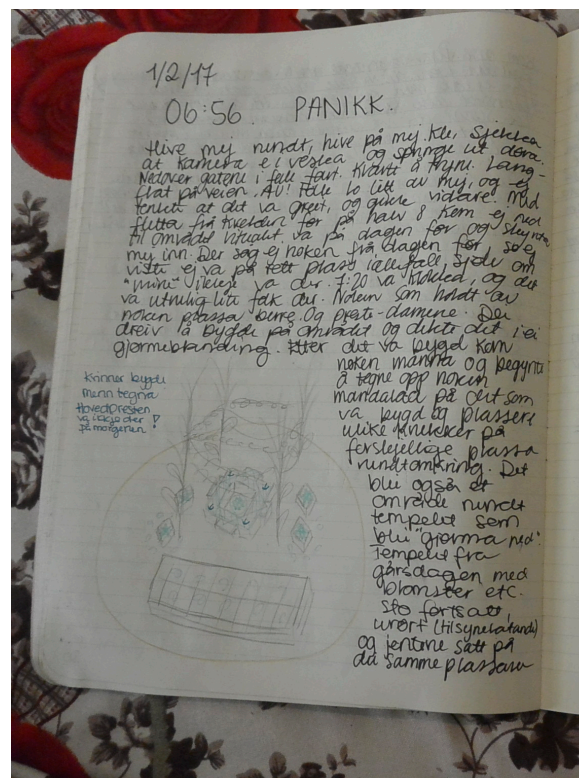


Plate 3: Notebook with illustrations and fieldnotes. Photo: the author

Some interview objects that would have potentially been valuable to this thesis simply did not reply to my request, and I was therefore not able to interview them. I planned so that the interview would take approximately 30 minutes, but the variation was from 15 minutes to three hours. The tone of the interview was informal, but prepared, and had an essence of a social visit rather than a formal interview. Where we did the interview varied from at their house, at a nearby café or at a meeting spot in town, at the choice of the interviewees. While Madden (2017) talks about smart pens as a tool for doing these kinds of interviews, I used a normal recorder. In fear of the possible malfunction of the recorder, the data file being lost or simply not being able to hear the interview, I took notes as well as the recording. Not only in fear of losing the sound file, but also to get the correct spelling of a Nepali or Newar word, and to be able to get the details straight. This also made it possible for me to take note of non-verbal communication which a recorder would not be able to catch.

2.4.2 Hunting social situations

To be able to find a variety of informants, I deliberately sought to find different social situations where I could get in touch with various types of informants and to become a part of a social group (Spradley, 1980). I had heard that a group of expats, which means western work immigrants, used to hang out at this particular spot after work and on the weekends, and I decided I would try to get in touch with them. It turned out that it was easy to become a part of this group, as they considered me one of them and they had a network that reached far beyond my expectations. Getting to know these expats, and them knowing how it is to come to Nepal with an idea of what one wants to do, was useful to my fieldwork. They asked me about my project and how it was going, and frequently introduced me to new informants. The owner of the place, Samantha from Austria, always greeted me when I entered and asked how my research was coming along. Robert, an American expat, invited me to his brother-in-law's wedding, and introduced me to any Newar he knew who came to the place in case they had something interesting to tell me or invite me to. Eventually, I became familiar with many of the regulars hanging out there, and through these informants I got to participate in a *bara* and in a wedding, as well as interview some of them.

2.4.3 My place in the crowd

In addition to the role as the family member with Amita and Deepak, and the researcher and friend among youth in Patan, I had various roles in other settings but I would never “blend in”

as a tall, white, blue eyed, blond woman. I always stood out in a crowd and this gave implications, especially during rituals and occasionally attracted unwanted and disturbing attention, which is not an uncommon thing among anthropologists (Wikan, 1996). Sometimes it was because people thought I was lost tourist that had just passed by or that they were curious about who I was. On occasion, drunk, elderly men would come up to me and introduce me to their sons, as if I was there to look for a husband, which forced my attention away from what was going on in the ritual. But usually people knew that I was a researcher, and shouted at me if I was not around when something important happened and explained to me what was going on.

Because I had been in Nepal during the earthquake in 2015, I always had something in common with the people I was talking to, and whenever I mentioned it in conversations with informants, it immediately legitimized my presence. It also legitimized my role as a researcher. I had experienced Nepal before, I knew what Nepali people had gone through, because I had been there myself, and this in combination with my rudimentary Nepali language skills gave me insight into the lives of many of my informants that I would not have gotten if I did not have these experiences. I would never be a complete or natural part of the culture, but I was accepted as a researcher and friend.

2.4.4 Making mistakes

During the fieldwork there was various situations where I was required to participate in one way or another, and on various occasions I would do something wrong. I would pollute a spatula when serving food, because I touched the plate, or I would accidentally go somewhere I was not supposed to go or pointing my feet in the wrong direction. This was never done by intent, but as it happened it gave me insight into aspects of the culture that I did not know existed, and gained valuable information while learning why something I did was wrong.

2.5 Method of Interpretation

Throughout the fieldwork I had a focus on being able to describe the rituals which were performed from an emic point of view, and investigate what meaning the rituals have to the Newar. My method of procuring and producing ethnographic information on the rituals that will be presented in this thesis follows Turner (1967), and through this method I would be able to describe the rituals in a detailed manner. This entailed keeping detailed descriptions of the performances and material objects used in the rituals. Moreover, it implied interviewing the

participants after the ritual performances on the local exegesis and interpretations of the purpose they state for performing the ritual. Through the interviews, I employed Turners method in recording social background of the participants and interviewees. I recorded details such as age, sex, caste and profession in order to discern how the meaning of dominant, multivocal ritual symbols varies according to position in society (ibid.). This was one of the components which made me realize the potential in my fieldnotes.

As for the rites of passage, Turner (1967) and his symbol theory does contain many different aspects, such as liminality and *communitas*. These would be relevant for this material, but to limit the thesis I will mainly focus on the concept of “fan of meaning”:

Certain dominant or focal symbols conspicuously possess this property of multivocality which allows for the economic representation of key aspects of culture and belief. Each dominant symbol has a ‘fan’ or ‘spectrum’ of references, which are interlinked by what is usually a simple mode of association, its very simplicity enabling it to interconnect a wide variety of *significata* (Turner, 1967, p. 50)

When focusing on local exegesis and social position through interviews I was able to see that there was a difference in the interpretation of the rites of passages. Youth and adults talked about the rituals in different ways, and the involvement in the ritual was different. In relation to local exegesis with the distinction between youth and adult, the different levels of meaning came to display. Through the fieldwork this was the main methodological framework used to work with the data material collected.

2.6 Ethical Reflections About the Researchers’ Role

Due to the nature of the anthropological fieldwork and its method, research ethics are important to not just consider, but to enforce. The fundamental nature of giving information and seeking consent from the participants is the primary step toward an ethical research process. While working with the project design, the project was submitted and approved by the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD) to secure the safety of the informants. During the research period, I verbally informed the purpose of the project and communicated to the participants that they would receive full anonymity in notes and throughout the thesis, and that they had the ability and opportunity to withdraw from the research at any point. This was done to level the

power balance between researcher and participant. Furthermore, the researcher's awareness of her own actions is important to avoid distress and harm for the participant, and to protect the wellbeing, safety and dignity of all involved participants. In addition, a researcher can never fully know if the surrounding situation is impacted by her presence. Being aware of the fact that the researcher *does have* these predisposed thoughts or ideas is crucial to a valid fieldwork.

When asked, I was never dishonest about reasons for my participation in rituals or my presence at the temple or public meeting places, and I never received any negativity regarding this. When observing and/or participating in temples or public meeting places, an introduction of me as a researcher was not possible by any practical means. Observing people when I have not asked their permission is of course problematic. Temples are examples of a 'borderline official location'. The researcher has to be respectful of what she is studying, and treat the material carefully, not using video or tape recordings without anyone's permission. I made no recordings from these *covert* observations, so there will be no descriptions of or quotes from anybody with whom I did not interact directly.

After moving to Patan, another distinct ethical dilemma came up. As I became a friend of my informants, there are certain ethical measures that has to be considered. Who are they talking to, Karoline the researcher or Karoline the friend? Various interesting stories have been told to me as Karoline the friend and will not be included in this thesis. Through the thesis aliases have been used, and some cases have been anonymized by altering information which is not critical to the analysis of the different cases. This is all done to protect the anonymity of the informants so that they cannot be recognized.

*

Becoming Through Rites of Passages

The changing from one social status to another is celebrated in many cultures, and the Newars are not an exception to this. As Bucholtz (2002) said, we need to see these rites of passage in order to understand the youth. In this chapter I will give a detailed description of three rites of passage among the Newars, namely *ihī*, *bara* and *brata banda*. These are all initiation rites, and are observed by the Newar child and celebrated by their families and kin. In order to get an overview of the ritual descriptions, I will present a calendar of events of each of the rituals, following the examples of Richards (1988) and Simonsen (2000). To explore the interpretation of the rites of passage they will be related to the theories of ritual interpretation from van Gennep (1960), Turner (1967), Richards (1988) and Lewis (1980).

3.1 *Ihī*: Marriage to the Fruit

Ihī is a ceremony for girls in the Newar community in which pre-adolescent girls are married to the *bel* fruit, (*Aegle Marmelos*), also called a wood apple. The fruit is a symbol of the good Vishnu. Participants at a ritual I observed in Bhaktapur February 28th - March 2nd 2017 explained that they performed the ritual to ensure that the girls became fertile, to protect them from evil spirits, and that they stayed healthy. They also explained to me that the ritual is to protect the girls from becoming widows when their mortal husband dies. The *bel* fruit is a dominant symbol of the ritual, as well as the *mandap* (Turner, 1967). Local exegesis and the understanding of ritual symbols are done through their materiality; observable forms, capabilities and everyday use, and one of the characteristics of the *bel* fruit is that it does not rot (ibid.). After the ritual is performed, a woman will never become a widow as she is already married to the immortal god Vishnu. Women's socio-economic status is dependent of her father before marriage and husband after.

Another aspect that that my host Amita and other informants explained to me was of the custom of *sati*. *Sati* is an ancient practice in which a widow immolates herself by jumping onto the funeral pyre on which the body of her husband is cremated (Allen, 2000). Through this act of *sati* she shows her eternal love for him, and this is where the name *sati* originates from, meaning faithful wife. The custom of *sati* abolished Nepal in 1920, and has become obsolete whereas the ritual is still practiced (Michaels, 1993). Amita explains that the Newars started

this ritual so that their daughters would not become widows, and would have to perform this immolation, this because they now would be married to the celestial and immortal god Vishnu. My teacher said that it has been long since the last *sati* was performed, and that the reason why Newar girls still observe *ihī* is because of tradition. She also told me about another, even older foundational myth of the ritual *ihī*. According to her, they started doing the *ihī* during the Muslim invasion of Kathmandu valley in the mid-1300s (Whelpton, 2005). She explained further that the Muslims abducted young unmarried girls. Many ethnic groups began to put a red mark on the forehead, called *sindur*, on the girls. The red mark is a sign of being married and they hoped this would prevent the abduction of the unmarried girls. However, the Newars did not want to lie, and, therefore, invented the *ihī* marriage ritual, in which the girls marry the eternal god Vishnu, symbolized by the *bel* fruit. As married, they could honestly wear the red mark, *sindur*, and not be abducted by the Muslims.

Muskan is the sister-in-law of my host Amita, and mother of one of the two girls observing the ritual in Bhaktapur during the turn of the month February-March 2017 said that this event is important to the girls. They had looked forward to this for a long time, and were excited about dressing up in the nice dresses with lots of jewelry and makeup. It is also a time for celebration for the whole family. Moreover, she explained that the first day of the ritual was the last day that the girls were considered to be *kumari*. She explained to me that being a *kumari* means that you are a pre-adolescent girl, before a girl's first menstruation. Kumari is also a living goddess from the cult of Kumari (Allen, 1975). The Kumari is a Hindu pantheon symbolizing both the virgin and mother goddess. There are many places throughout Kathmandu valley where Kumari is chosen from the community as the representation of the living goddess where the main emphasis is put on 32 perfections (Moaven, 1974). These include requirements of physical appearance, like black straight hair, white teeth, dark eyes and eyelashes like the cow, and the personal characteristics of the Kumari has to be bold, and her horoscope cannot be in conflict with the horoscope of the king. However, the most important requirement is that she has not reached puberty, as when she start her first menstruation she can no longer be the Kumari (Allen, 1975)

During the *ihī*, the nine girls sitting first on the first row are called principal girls, meaning that they meet more criteria for being a *kumari* than the other girls present. Muskan explains that another aspect of being of the principal girls is that it costs more. They payed 2500rs. each, while others may pay between 350-500rs. Through the concept of expressed purpose, the fact that some spend more money on the ritual, can be said to be a secondary

purpose and express the conditions for upbringing (Richards, 1988). This will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Through the example from Richards (1988) and Simonsen (2000) this calendar of events show the different stages of the ritual, its purposes, where the sequence is performed, and according to the descriptions of ritual sequence from van Gennep (1960) the rite in itself is. The information in this calendar is collected during my interview of the mother of one of the girls observing the ritual during the turn of the month February-March 2017.

	<i>Sequence</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Kind of rite</i>
<i>1st day</i>	Ancestor worship	Preparing the ancestor	Home	(Preparation for 2 nd day)
	Worship of the deity	Preparing the deities	Courtyard	
	Measurement rite	Measuring life	Courtyard	
	Grinding the lentils	Education	Courtyard	
	Joint feast	Breaking the fast	Courtyard	
<i>2nd day</i>	Fire sacrifice	Inviting the deities	Courtyard	Separation
	<i>Puja</i>	Welcoming	Courtyard	Separation
	Cutting the toenails	Purification	Courtyard	Separation
	Circumbating the <i>mandap</i>	Offering to the mandap	Courtyard	Separation
	Offering at temple	Offering to the deities	Temple	Separation
	Receiving <i>sindur</i>	Preparing the marriage	Courtyard	Transition
	Block print	Inviting Vishnu	Courtyard	Transition
	Kanyadaan	Giving of the virgin	Courtyard	Transition
	Taking alms	Receiving gifts	Courtyard	Transition
	Joint feast	Breaking the fast	Home	Incorporation
	Entering the home	Welcoming the married girl to the home	Home	Incorporation
<i>3rd day</i>	Well-wishing feast	Introducing the married girl to family and kin	Home	Incorporation

Figure 3: Calendar of events for *ih* performed in Bhaktapur 2017

3.1.1 Fruitful preparations

Amita had invited me to join her and her daughters, Nirupa and Lalita, to attend the *ihī* of her two nieces. Amita's two brothers have a daughter each that was going to observe the ritual February 28th - March 2nd 2017. On the morning of the ceremony, Amita woke me up and she told me I had to go by myself because she started her menstrual cycle. This meant that she could not enter the place in which the ritual was performed. She was seen as unclean and impure and would therefore spoil the ritual purity just by entering the premises. Amita gave me the phone number of her sister-in-law, Muskan, and her brother, Nadin, and she told me to give them a call when I arrived at Suribinaek, just down the hill from Bhaktapur. Amita's older brother, Nadin, picked me up at the bus station. He walked swiftly up to me and said, "*Amitako sathi?* – Amita's friend?", and when confirmed he turned around again, eager to return to the ceremony. We walked in a steady pace down a street from the main road. There were convenient stores, grocery sellers and teashops along the road, and many people. It took us only about five minutes to walk to the compound where the ceremony was held. The entrance into the courtyard was through a small opening in a wire fence on the side of the road. Nadin walked straight in to the courtyard through a hole in the wire fence, and I followed right behind. They had placed many straw mats on the ground of the courtyard for people to sit, which formed a small alley leading from the entrance to the center of the courtyard. They had also made paths to walk on, or lines, from the center of the courtyard to three house walls, the houses facing the courtyard together with the wire fence. Nadin took me with him into the courtyard and we walked the paths between the mats

In the center of the courtyard, the priest had erected a *mandap*, a temporary structure of pillars used during wedding ceremonies where the rituals are performed. The *mandap* was decorated with yellow marigold flowers put on strings. They were hung up and down the four bamboo pillars holding the structure. Streamers in white, red, yellow, green and black were also hung in the same manner as the flowers. Between the pillars, they had hung a deep red piece of fabric that made a square over the center of the *mandap*. It had valances down the sides that were decorated with a thick golden border and worked as a tarp over the area in which the priest ignited the fire on the second day.



Plate 4: The *mandap* on the first day of *ihī*. Photo: the author



Plate 5: Measurement ritual. Photo: the author

The different families present sat quite close to each other, especially considering that they had carried big bags with them containing all that they needed for the ceremony. Plastic baskets, big brass bowls, brass jugs laid in a jumble between the rows on which the *kumaris* and their companies sat. Muskan, Nadin's wife, said there were 137 *kumaris* observing the *ihī* that day, in this particular location. The age span was from three years to nine-ten years old, and they sat in a circle, starting with the first principal girl being on the front row and the rest following around clockwise.

When I arrived at the ritual, Amitas two nieces Kala and Sajni, who was observing the *ihī*, sat together with their mothers, Muskan and Maina. They performed *puja* together. A male participant repeated to me what the priest had been explaining over the microphone, saying what they were supposed to do during the *puja*, and that this was some kind of educational purpose and practice for the *kumaris* to learn how to perform a *puja* by themselves, as they now were old enough to participate in the household.

Maina and Muskan told their daughters what to pick up, when and whether to throw it onto the *sukunda*, a lamp with the iconography of Lord Shiva on it, spread it in a circle or simply place it somewhere on the *puja* area. They threw rice over their shoulders, put *sindur* on the *sukunda*, and poured water on the area on the ground to which they gave the offerings. After the sequence of learning the *puja*, the girls received blessings from *guruma*, who was the wife of one of the priests, and whose role was to act as a ritual assistant. Through the ritual she is an important character. She went about with a wooden bucket full of flowers, and poured the flowers on the heads of the *kumaris*. She also circled burning candlewick around their heads, one at the time, as a sign of good luck.

Now the priests were ready to go to the temple to perform a *puja* in honor of the *kumaris*. This meant that the *kumaris* could take a break, which they all enjoyed, and instantly they started to play with each other. The *kumaris* fasted during the ritual. Muskan revealed, however, that they did not follow this tradition very strictly; they gave the *kumaris* juice and some candy. This was something Muskan and Maina was not allowed to do when they observed *ihī*, but Muskan said she felt so sorry for her starving girls that she just had to give them some juice and candy, and explained that "sugary stuff is OK". As Lewis (1980) says, everyone is aware of the rules, and chooses how to relate to them within the context in which they are to be enforced.

The main ritual of the day was a blessing for the *kumaris* and wishing them a long life, called the measuring ritual. This was done by running 108 cotton threads between two bamboo-sticks placed on each *kumaris* head and on her feet. Guruma performed the ritual, and she

walked around to each and one of the *kumaris* with a wooden bucket, the same that she used for the blessing in which she emptied the bucket onto the *kumaris*' heads, making flowers fall on their heads. Guruma started with the first principal *kumari*. They put six balls of white cotton thread in the bucket. The family of the *kumari* took the sticks and put them in place. The *kumari* was standing on one of the sticks and the other was held over her head. The sticks were on the list of what they had to bring with them for the ritual. Guruma started by tying the thread onto the lower stick and ran a thread from each of the six cotton balls up and down between the sticks counting a total of 18 times, which made the thread count a total of 108. When the rounds were completed, she ripped off the thread to separate it from the remaining thread in the bucket, and tied up the 108 threads. The family of the *kumari* took over from here and twined the thread around the sticks to make sure it would not tangle. In the evening after first day of rituals I was able to ask Amita what the measuring was all about, and she explained that how long the threads are is a symbol of how long the *kumaris* life will be and also if it will be a good life.

When guruma had done her part, she continued to the next *kumari*. The rest of the *kumaris*, all used yellow thread. In my interview with Muskan, she explained that thought that this was just to distinguish that the first *kumari* was the special one. This part of the ritual took a while; after all, 137 *kumaris* would have to have this part of the ritual done individually. The *kumaris* that waited to perform the ritual and the ones that had completed it, all had to stand the whole time, and since it took a while, they became rather tired. The girl next to Kala and Sajni got really tired and wanted to sit down. She was strictly prohibited to do so, and started to cry. After trying to console her, yelling at her to stop crying, the girl's grandmother tried another approach. She told the little girl that, if she did not stop crying, "the white woman will take you with her" and she got so frightened that she stopped crying immediately. The rest of the participants that was within ear reach reacted by laughing and looking at me. Muskan explained what the grandmother had said.

After the measurement ritual was completed, the *kumaris* had to walk one round around the temporary temple, the *mandap*, while throwing water, flowers and rice at it as an offering to the gods. When this had been completed, they walked out of the courtyard to the entrance where they lined up to grind lentils. This is a part of the educational part of the ritual. Sabina, Amita's sister, explains that the *kumaris* learn to grind lentils the way that they did in the olden times, but it is more or less a symbolic education of the practice as of now. On the ground, guruma had put a grinding rock, black lentils and the rolling rock that the *kumaris* put their feet on and wiggled back and forth to grind the lentils. According to my teacher, grinding these lentils is a symbol of the household education the girl has undertaken during the *ihī*. Grinding

lentils is a common exercise, but usually one uses the hands. Lewis (1980) calls it instrumental rationality, which is exactly this, an everyday activity which is not immediately recognizable, and gives the feeling that there is another aspect to the ritual in itself than the everyday activity.

At the end of the day, there was held a *bhoj* for the *kumaris*. This marked the end of the fast for the day, as well as the end of their last day as a *kumari*. During the next day they would be married to the *bel* fruit and take a different position in the household where they would have to contribute as part of the women in the house.



Plate 6: A *kumari* grinding lentils. Photo: the author

3.1.2 Becoming married

In the morning of the second day of *ihī* some preparations were made to the *mandap* before the girls arrived and the ceremony started. Guruma was building some small structures around the previous day's *mandap*. In the middle they built a fire pit, around some podiums, four small and one big one. One of the families that had showed up early to the courtyard explained that the guruma covered the structures with a mixture of cow dung, clay and water to make it pure. The assistant priests came to the courtyard after the structures were built to paint geometrical mandalas on the structures with rice powder. The ritual started with a welcoming *puja* that the girls did together with their mothers. In the same manner as the day before, the girls sat together with their mothers learning how to perform the *puja*. The priest was giving instructions, and the mothers were showing the girls how to do it, if it was pouring water on the flowers, putting color powder on a stone or throwing rice. Then, the priest built a fire in the middle of the *mandap*. This holy fire is the center of the ceremony and what the ritual is organized after. The girls are seated clockwise around the fire pit, and the first nine girls are the principal *kumaris*. After these nine *kumaris* there is no obligatory seating for the rest of the *kumaris*. The priests recited mantras and made offerings of rice, flowers, and color powder to the fire. One of the fundamental characteristics of the *mandap* is the cloth covering the fire. Guruma walked around the compound giving blessings to the girls



Plate 7: The *mandap* the second day. Photo: the author

after the fire in the *mandap* was lit. She carried a bucket full of flowers and placed flowers on the head of each girl. All the girls stood upright, even when they had received the flowers and blessing. When guruma had completed the round and all 137 girls had received a blessing, the girls sat down. Their mothers prepared an offering that they had to take to the temple across the street. Meat, rice and cow dung was laid on a bamboo plate that the girls carried with them to the temple. The principal *kumari* was walking first, and the rest followed her. They walked one round around the *mandap* before leaving the courtyard going to the temple where they received a blessing from the priests.

When returning from the temple, the girls all received a block print called *sapaqua* that they placed on top of their head. The *kumaris* that had hair jewelry put it underneath, so that it would stay in place. The *sapaqua* is, according to Amita, a representation of the god in image. That is why they put it on their heads, towards the sky, so that the gods will see that they are *kumari*, a living goddess, and that Vishnu will come down to marry them. When the girls had received their *sapaqua* they got *sindur* in the middle parting of the hair. This is a symbol of getting married, and is what is done in the *vivahan* as well as to symbolize that the bride and groom are in unity. After they have received the *sindur*, they wear the *ihprashi*, the first *saree* of the girl. Traditionally, according to Gutschow and Michaels (2008), the *saree* was woven by a senior woman, however it is more and more common to buy the first *saree* at the market. Sabina explained to me that she still had her *ihprashi* at home, and that she remembered from when she was younger that she was so proud of this first *saree*.

Receiving the *bel* fruit is the big happening of the day. This has to do with what the *bel* fruit represents. It is the husband of the girl, a representation of the god Vishnu, and has characteristics that represent the girls future husband. It is important to the Newars that the fruit does not have any blemishes, is ripe and that it has a good size. This indicates that the future husband will be a good, tall man. If the fruit has blemished, the girl is doomed to a life with an ugly and unfaithful husband. The size of the fruit is equivalent to the size of the husband. When Muskan and her husband Nadin received the *bel* fruit for Sajni, they heard from the family next to them that they were unhappy with the *bel* fruit that they received. It was too small! Muskan quickly, with a laugh in her voice, said that “look at my husband! I got a big, ripe, perfect *bel* fruit, but I have a tiny husband!”. They all burst out in laughter, and the family seemed like they were OK with the *bel* fruit. The aspect here of an imagined future husband is not something that is unique for the Newar, and many different traditional societies have this concept during rites of passage for girls, especially when they are paired with marriage rituals (Richards, 1988; Strathern, 1995)

The *kumaris* now wear the yellow thread that they received performing the measurement ritual the previous day. Now she has the complete outfit, with *ihprashi*, *sapaqua*, painted feet, *sindur*, *bel* fruit and *salah pacha*. The girl is now ready for *kanyadaan*, the giving of the virgin. This is the main ritual of the second day where the father gives his daughter to the *bel* fruit. The parents make offerings to the *bel* fruit before they perform the *kanyadaan*. ritual The father holds the *bel* fruit and the mother places two coins on the fruit, one silver and one gold. They also put color powder on the *bel* fruit. Rice and flowers are given to the *bel* fruit, and the father is now standing behind the girl. He is holding his hand over hers, ready to drop the *bel* fruit into her hands.

When *kanyadaan* is finished, gifts are given to the girls. Everyone walks around to each other to give gifts to all the girls They start by giving rice over the *bel* fruit into the *salah pacha*, then giving the gift. Many give candy, while family members or family friends give gifts like fabric, cloth or shoes. The day at the courtyard is finished by a *bhoj*. The girls are served food, in the same manner as the previous day. The nine principal girls are served on copper plates, raised on a tripod, while the other girls are served on *lapte* leaf plates.

When returning to the home, the girls line up, and the senior most woman of the family offer them gifts. This was a kind of *threshold* rite for welcoming the married girl home (van Gennep, 1960). She gives them rice, like they did in the courtyard, and presents them with gifts and clothing. Amita and Sabina gives them dresses. It is Sabina that presents the gifts, and Amita is menstruating and is therefore impure. Some neighbors come and give the girls gifts. When everyone is finished giving gifts to the girls, they enter into the home.



Plate 8: A married girl with all the ritual objects. Photo: the author

3.2 *Bara*: The Seclusion

The seclusion of a girl before her first menstruation is the second of the initiation rituals of the girl, called *bara*, and is the transition from being pre-sexual to sexual (Bennett, 1983). This is understood to refer to the reproductive system of the girl and starting her menstrual cycle. After observing the *bara*, the girl is considered to be a woman, and is ready to marry. *bara* is not an exclusively Newar ritual. It is performed by many of the other ethnic groups throughout Nepal. Colloquially, its known in Nepali as *gufa*, but the full name of the ritual is *gufa rakne*, or *gufa basne*, which means putting in a cave or staying in a cave, which is what the ritual entails. The girl observing the ritual is confined in a cave for twelve days where no sunlight can enter. On the twelfth day she will be marrying the sun, a symbol of Lord Shiva. Ramesh, the father of a girl observing the *bara* on March 19th 2017, explained that the sun is the symbol of life, as nothing can grow on earth without the sun. It is an eternal power in the universe, and therefore does not die. Nowadays it seems more and more normal to make the ritual somewhat shorter than how it used to be. Ramesh, said that they did not have time to go visit her as much as is required, and that they did not want to take her out of school for twelve days, so they chose the option to keep her in a Buddhist monastery for two days during the weekend. The *bara* is only observed by the girl after she has observed the *ihi*, the first initiation ritual for the girl. *bara* is observed between the age of five and thirteen, and all my informants told me that this had been a fun and exciting experience for them.

There are two different kinds of *bara* (Nepali, 1965). The first one occur before the first menstruation, and is called *bara-tayegu*, and the second is called *bara-chonegu* and is performed *at* the girls first menstruation. One would perform one or the other, not both. The rituals are performed by *phupu*, fathers' elder sister, not the family priest. Contradictory to what Nepali says in his book *The Newars* about *bara-chonegu* being the most typical of the two rituals, Amita and Uditia told me that they strive to perform the *bara-tayegu* (ibid.). Amita didn't even tell me about the *bara-chonegu*, which to me is a sign of its insignificance in Newar culture today. Therefore, when referring to *bara*, this will mean the *bara-tayegu*.

During the days that she spends in the cave, the girl learns how to become a woman. Her main restriction is that she cannot see the sun, in other words leave the cave, as well as eat salt before the fourth day. Her female family members, neighbors, and friends can visit her from the fourth day. Male family members that have observed the *brata banda* cannot enter into the cave, but young brothers and friends that have not gone through the *brata banda* can visit. The friends of the girl often come to play games, while elder women tell stories, sing

songs and teach them to dance. In addition to entertainment, education about how to be a woman is given by the elder women. They teach the girl how to do her makeup, to take care of her skin and how to behave as a woman. This is to prepare her to being a wife.

At the beginning of the ritual, the *bara khya* is hung in one of the corners of the cave. This is a representation of the she-devil, and is by many of my informants explained as a ghost. Elder women tell ghost stories about this *bara khya* and how it is protecting the *bara*-girl from malevolent influence. During the twelve days that the girl spends in the cave, she offers a portion of her food to the *bara khya* for every meal. An informant told me when he was visiting his sister their aunt had told scary stories about the *bara khya*, so that he left the cave and did not return as he was so scared of it. The details of what was told about the she-devil was not clear to him, as he was so young, but he remembered that he was really frightened.

The girl is considered to be impure during the whole ritual. Therefore, a purifying bath is taken at the end of the confinement to make her ready for the ceremony where she is married to the sun. This has to happen before sunrise on the twelfth day. After she is bathed, her eyes get covered and she leaves the room in which she has been confined and to her home or a convenient place with good view of the sun where the ceremony of ‘seeing the sun’ will be performed.

The following calendar of events of the *bara* performed on 19th March 2017. It is constructed by attaining information from the father of the *bara*-girl and from a friend of the family, Udita. The information is obtained through interviews done after the ritual.

	<i>Sequence</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Kind of rite</i>
<i>1st day</i>	Going to cave	Seclusion	Cave	Separation
<i>2nd day</i>	Senior woman arrives	Purifying of the girl	Cave	Separation
	Visit from family	Education	Cave	Separation
<i>3rd day</i>	Decorating the girl	Preparation	Cave	Transition
	Leaving the cave		Cave	Transition
	Sun <i>puja</i>	Worship of the sun	House	Transition
	Prosession	Make public	Street	Transition
	Receiving sindur	Mark the marriage	Temple	Transition
	Entering the home	Welcoming home	Home	Incorporation
	<i>4th day</i>	Feast	Celebrate	Venue

Figure 4: Calendar of events for *bara* performed in Kathmandu 2017

3.2.1 Returning from the cave

March 19th 2017, Indu, nine years a girl was going to be married to the sun and complete her *bara*. Her mother, Mahi, and her *phupu* and ritual master, Daya, had taken her to a Buddhist monastery on the Friday after school where she would spend two nights. In an interview, Ramesh, Indu's father, explained that they are not themselves Buddhist, but this was an option that worked for them since no one had time to visit her, and they did not want to take her out of school for 12 days straight. This can be seen in light of the discussion of syncretism and co-existence, and to the argument that it is not important to the Newars themselves which religion a ritual or a sequence follows. Uditā, a friend of the family, has a daughter the same age as Indu, and she explained that she would do the same for her daughter, for the same reasons, but she put more emphasis on not taking her out of school for that long. She added that in today's Nepal, more and more women have jobs and are more modern than previously. Therefore, to accommodate to today's society has more value to the individuals than actually performing the ritual exactly as has been done traditionally.

The marriage ritual starts on the last day in the cave were Indu's mother Mahi and *phupu* Daya picks her up from the monastery in which she has spent the last two nights. In the monastery they perform the ritual purifying bath and the preparation of the bride to be. She is wearing a traditional red wedding *saree* and jewelry. Her nails are painted and she puts on makeup with the help of Mahi and Daya before they go to Daya's house. To protect Indu from seeing the sun on her way from the monastery back home, a shawl is put over her head on the way from the monastery back to the house. After entering the house, and being placed in a room that is prepared for her to be there, in other words, a room where no sunlight shines through windows or doors, the shawl is removed. The ritual master, Daya, explained that they had to wait there till the clouds had gone and the sun was out. Amita jokingly told me in the morning before I left the house that "when it is cloudy outside, we say that there is a *bara* today, because the sun is hiding from his bride".

As soon as the clouds went away and the sun was shining, we went to balcony on the roof of the house. This was where the *puja* was going to be performed. It was a small space, all fourteen guests wanted to have good view of the *puja*. Some were standing in the doorway from the kitchen out to the balcony, others stood on the roof top, and some in the stairs leading to the roof top. When everyone was in place, Indu came to the roof together with Daya, who was performing the *puja* with Indu. She was still covered with the red shawl and Daya was ready with the offering plate, both of them facing the sunstone on which they were performing the *puja*.



Plate 9: The *bara*-girl covered with a shawl. Photo: the author

When Daya removed the shawl she said to Indu: “*Namaste gara, lah* – do a namaste”. Indu did as *phupu* told her, and did a namaste gesture by putting her palms together right after the shawl was removed. She had not seen sunlight in three days, and it is bright for the eyes. She had to look up at the sun, because she was greeting to her husband to be. Then the female spectators asked her if she knew the sun salutation, and she replied “*Aunchha, aunchha!* – I know it, I know it!”. She folded her hands to make a small hole between her fingers that she was looking at the sun through. She held it for about 10 seconds before looking down at the sunstone and holding her hand up to protect her eyes from the sun. Daya adjusted Indu’s *saree* and jewelry while Indu was fanning her eyes to not ruin her makeup, as she was tearing up from seeing the sun. They took a small break to take some pictures of Indu and Daya together with Indu’s mother Mahi and grandmother.

The *puja* continued with Daya pouring water in Indu’s hands over the sunstone. Daya showed Indu how to shake the water onto the sunstone before Daya took yellow color powder and smeared it on the topmost part of the stone in a specific shape. One dot over, and a rounded bow underneath. First in yellow, then adding orange and red, before adding red to the whole painting. Rice was put at the painting at the end, and red, yellow and orange flowers were put at the top and at the bottom of the painting. *Nimkee*, a pink sweet bread, was put at the bottom of the stone, not covering either the flowers nor the painting. A banana was laid on the bread, then leafs, coins and rice. Indu received the water jug from Daya which she placed next to the sunstone that Daya decorated. Daya gave her flowers, rice and green leafs and Indu did namaste gesture again, and placed the offering over the painting. Daya poured water into a conch which had an orange marigold flower at the tip. Candle wicks were placed on the offering plate and it was lit, and put back on the plate. Daya took the candle wicks back and raised them in the air, and they both looked at the sun. Daya made small circles with the wicks before she takes Indu’s hand they do the circular motions together. The wicks are now placed all the way at the top of the stone, at the edge of the balcony fence. Daya handed Indu the conch and helped her pour out the water which is inside the conch on the floor six times. The conch was placed between the wicks and the sunstone. *Sindur* was smeared on the conch before offering rice and leafs. Daya then took the conch back and Indu did namaste gesture to the sun. The ritual is finished by Daya taking the offering and lifting it to Indu’s head and gives it to Indu’s grandmother.

3.2.2 Becoming a woman

Indu was walking next to her mother on the way to *Ganesh Mandir*, just up the road from their house. Indu was carrying a *jhala nyaka* – a mirror, and a *sinamo* – a *sindur* container. The rest

of the ritual entourage was walking with Indu and Mahi. Daya was walking just behind with the offering plate covered with a cloth. If this was to protect it from the sun, flies or monkeys, I don't know, but it was at least covered. The *sinamo* contains the *sindur* that Daya was going to put on her head. Before the ceremony started, some pictures were taken of Indu and the female family members. While this was happening, her father Ramesh was cleaning out left over offerings from the small *mandir* in which they were performing the *puja* shortly after the pictures were taken. The ceremony at the temple was short. Daya instructed Indu in what to do by showing her first. In that way they did everything twice, but in a cycle of three. They threw rice thrice, put flowers and *sindur* in the *mandir* as an offering to the gods in the temple. There was a big cloud of orange color powder around the temple Daya put the *sindur* in Indus forehead, which she did three times. The *sindur* is a dominant symbol of Indu being married to the sun (Turner, 1967). Udit explains that as well as it symbolizes that she is married to the sun, it is also for good luck. Traditionally, the girls observing the *bara* wear the *sindur* from the *puja* for four days, but Indu wore it only at the *puja* and then washed it away before the party in the evening.

When she had received the *sindur*, more pictures were taken. Different groups of people stood next to Indu for photos. One with her Mahi, Daya and *hajurama*, one with her friend, one with the whole entourage, and some of just her. After the pictures was taken, people swiftly started to move towards the house again. The *threshold* rite *griha pravesh* was going to be performed before Indu could enter the house again (van Gennep, 1960). This is done to welcome the married woman back into the house by the senior women, as well as inviting her into womanhood.

Next we gathered in the living room where we ate *sagun*, which is boiled egg and dried fish. This is an offering prepared for everyone present at the ritual, and could also be seen as a blessing of the girl. After *sagun* we received some tea and some *paan roti*, a sweet round bread. This was mostly because of Indu. She had been fasting the whole day and was hungry and she could now eat. After eating *sagun*, the gift giving ceremony started. Indu was given different gifts from different family members. From Daya she was given a *saree*, and from her grandparents she was given a necklace in the shape of the letter 'I' for Indu. The rest of the family members gave her money.



Plate 10: The *bara*-girl and her phupu offering to the gods. Photo: the author

Traditionally, after the gift giving ceremony, the *bara*-girl is supposed to walk around to the neighbors to invite them to the following *bhoj*. Ramesh and Mahi had decided to have the reception/*bhoj* at a party palace, and had therefore sent the invitations beforehand. Ramesh told me that the perks of having the reception at a party palace is that they did not have to do anything themselves. They just show up, and everything is done for them. The food is prepared, decorated and snacks and drinks are served. He told me that since they are busy people, this was a good way to do it. They would not have a whole day to prepare the food for all the guests. He also mentioned that when they do it like this, they invite more people to the party. They had invited 350 guests, but knew that not all would show up, but some came from far away to participate in the reception. This reception can be said to have two different purposes, where the primary purpose is to celebrate that Indu observed the *bara*, and as a secondary purpose, her family can show, in a legitimized way, their socio-economic status (Richards, 1988).

3.3 *Brata banda*: An Entrance to Manhood

The period when young Newar boys become initiated to the *guthi*, caste and lineage is an important part of Newar traditions. (Nepali 1965) In addition, the *brata banda* marks the acceptance of religion. Becoming a member of the *guthi* means that the boy receives certain responsibilities and obligations, but usually before marriage these are voluntary (ibid.). After initiation, the Newar boy is free to roam freely in temple areas, as well as to partake in calendric festivals which the *guthi*, where he is a member, is in charge of. Supriya, the mother of two of the novices in the ritual I shall describe below, told me in an interview that the ones observing the *brata banda* accepts the Hindu religion and culture, and therefore they become ‘real Hindu boys’ Amita explained it as taking an oath, to understand what is right and wrong, to be religious. This becomes evident if a boy who have not observed *brata banda* passes away, because he will not be cremated (Nepali, 1965). The ritual also marks the boys as adolescents, or as grown up. Aadi, who is a 29-year-old man from Bhaktapur, told me in an interview, that the *brata banda* is very important to the Newars, it is when the boy “becomes grown up”, and that “it is done before marriage”. There is no upper age limit for a boy or man to observe the ritual, but it is usually observed when the boys are between the age of five and fourteen, and they have to observe it before they marry (Nepali, 1965). At the same time, Aadi said that to him, the ritual is not so important, but if his future son would want to observe the *brata banda*, he would be supportive.

The timing of the performance of the ritual at the temple follows the Hindu astrological calendar. They had called an astrologer, *Yoshin*, find a date when it would be possible to perform the ritual. Amita's younger sister, Sabina, told me that the choosing of a date to perform the ritual is based on each individual's birth chart. The astrologer reads the birth chart to check if it corresponds to the particular date one has chosen, and whether or not it will be a good day for the particular ritual. Moreover, she explained that 29th of January 2017 was a special day. The astrological symbols made it auspicious for anyone to observe the ritual at this day.

The following calendar of events during the *brata banda* derives from the interview with Supriya, the mother of two initiates who observed the ritual on 29th January 2017.

	<i>Sequence</i>	<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Place</i>	<i>Kind of rite</i>
<i>1st day</i>	Death rites	Preparing ancestors for initiation	Home	Separation
<i>2nd day</i>	Shaving of the head and cutting of toenails	Purification	Home	Separation
	Touching the iron key	Inviting to the household	Home	Separation
	The girding of the yellow loin cloth	Inviting to initiation	Home	Separation
	Procession	Display the ritual	Streets	Separation
	Sacrifice	Pleasing the deity	Temple	Transition
	Receiving Loin Cloth	Entering the lineage	Temple	Transition
	Changing clothes	Entering into adulthood	Temple	Incorporation
	Sacrifice	'Gifts' to initiates	Temple	Incorporation
	Bhoj	Feast	School yard	Incorporation
	<i>3rd day</i>	<i>Puja</i> and offering	Show social status and wishing well-being of initiate	Temple
<i>4th day</i>	Formal feast		Venue	
	Finishing the ritual	Distributing final parts of sacrificed animals	Home	

Figure 5: Calendar of events in *brata banda* performed in Bhaktapur 2017

3.3.1 Preparation and purification

Supriya had invited her childhood friend, Amita, to participate in the *brata banda* initiation ritual for her sons. Supriya had two sons, who are two and nine years old and were going to be initiated in Bhaktapur, an ancient Newar city in the eastern part of Kathmandu valley, on January 29th 2017. The son of Supriya's brother-in-law was also going to be initiated that day. Amita, my host, brought along her two young daughters, Lalita and Nirupa, to the ceremony, and invited me to join them. We arrived Supriya's house around 11:30 am, at the very end of the ceremony, when they performed *puja*. *Puja* is a prayer to honor and worship one or more deities, or to celebrate an event or guests. Usually, they perform the *puja* in the homes and at the temples. *Puja* is always a part of life cycle rituals or festival events. It includes prayers, worship and sacrificing to the gods, and constitute a ritual sequence. The room in which they performed *puja* was crowded. We got the first hint of this when we saw a mountain of shoes in the stairway on our way upstairs to a large living room. Both Supriya's family, her husband's family and the family of his brother's wife were present, members from the *guthi* to which the boys would be initiated, as well kin and friends. Not only the amount of people contributed to the feeling that the room was crowded; a lot of gifts took also up a large space of the room. All were dressed for the occasion in traditional attire. The novices were dressed up in their festive traditional dresses called *daura suruwal*. Their dresses had a base of beige color with red and golden patterns on them. On the head, they wore a *tupi* - a typical Nepali hat, in the same color and pattern as the *daura suruwal*. Wrapped around the *tupi* was a white cloth that made them look as if they wore turbans. As decoration, the boys wore flower necklaces, called *dubomala*. This necklace was made of green flower leafs that were held together by plastic ribbons in silver, red, yellow, green and orange.

Supriya and her sister-in-law wore red *sarees* in thick Indian silk with flower patterns in gold and silver, and their hair was well managed in a bun in the neck. Supriya's husband and brother-in-law were wearing *daura suruwal*, the kind where one wears a jacket over a long shirt in plain colors, usually light grey or beige, without any pattern. The pants are usually in the same color as the shirt. This is what you most often see Newar men wearing when they dress up. The rest of the women were wearing *sarees*, most of them in a red hue, while some of the men were wearing *daura suruwal*, while some wore jeans, a t-shirt and a *tupi*. The difference in degree of dressing up did not seem to depend in position in the family or role in the ritual, as it seemed arbitrary which of the men were wearing a *daura suruwal* or not.



Plate 11: The novices in traditional attire. Photo: the author



Plate 12: Carrying *lakhbatti* around Ganesh Mandir. Photo: the author

In the middle of the room, the novices sat together with their parents and the oldest family members, and Supriya was holding the youngest of the novices; he was fast asleep. The family priest sat in front of them giving instruction to perform the *puja*. They performed prayers to the deity and received presents: Shoes, hats, and clothes on trays covered in plastic, and ritual food and paraphernalia like fruit and bakery. The boys' grandmother, father's mother, gave the novices 10.000 candle wicks (*lakhbatti*). The candlewicks were laid in six big brown clay bowls, and which they had sprinkled with red powder. In an interview, Supriya explained that the candle wicks are for the gods and making wishes come true.

When the prayers ended, the male members of the family took a tray each and walked out of the house, while others followed. Everyone were going to the temple to continue the ceremony there. Just finding ones' shoes was a bit of a hassle, as the pile of shoes in the stairway had started to move down the stairs, but eventually all were out of the house. A Newar band that accompanied the procession to the temple, playing traditional tunes. The Newar band walked in a cluster so they could have contact with each other as they played and sang. The remainder of the members of the ritual entourage were walking in a line carrying the gifts behind the band. Those who walked in the front of the line carried the animals that were to be sacrificed at the temple. The rest of the ritual entourage carried the gifts that the novices had received at the house. To walk through the streets carrying the gifts is a way to show the neighbors what conditions these children will be brought up in, and can be said to be a secondary purpose of the *brata banda* (Richards, 1988).

The temple we were going to is called *Balaku Ganesh Mandir* and is placed up the hill from Supriyas. It lies close to the old palace square called Bhaktapur Durbar Square, in a place called Balaku. The temple was placed in the middle of an intersection where three roads met, almost as a kind of roundabout. Scooters and motorbikes passed the temple and pedestrians with bags full of groceries walked on the side of the road while the rituals were performed.

The temple contains two stories, with gilded roofs; it stands out from the simpler houses that surrounds it. Carved wood pillars support each corner of the temple, and multicolored iconography of various gods is placed between the two roofs, and inside the temple. Balaku Ganesh Mandir worships the god Ganesh. Ganesh is widely known as the god of beginnings, and is therefore often honored in the beginning of rites and ceremonies (Brown, 1991). Many devotees of other Hindu gods use Ganesh as the initiator to or as a road directly to one's goals and success, which makes Ganesh one of the most worshiped gods in Hindu religion (ibid.).

When we reached the temple, the entire procession walked three times around it. The place was crowded; another family performed a ritual at the temple when we arrived. Being an

auspicious day meant that many families assembled at the temple to perform the ritual, one family at a time. At one point, there were three other families waiting in line, following the families I observed. They arrived quite early; they just had to wait for one family to complete the ritual performances.

After the procession had walked the rounds, the band took place at the side of the road next to the temple. They kept playing while the male family members placed the gifts which they carried on a little structure next to the temple. They placed the different gifts in a particular order, placing the fruits and bakeries in one corner, the clothes, shoes, and hats in another corner, and the candle wicks (*lakhbatti*) in the front, and the animals brought for sacrificing were tethered to the structure.

The ritual began in a particular way. The male family members cleaned the *mandir* of old offerings from other families who had just completed their ritual. They decorated the temple with the gifts that the novices had received at the house. They hung flowers and popcorn on strings on the corners and on other points just outside the edge of the roof of the temple, at which they could hang the ritual paraphernalia. Again, if we look Richards (1988) at and the term expressed purpose, there is reason to believe that this decoration of the temple can fall under the category of secondary purpose.

When they had decorated the temple and put all the paraphernalia used for the sacrifice for the deity (*puja*) in the correct order and place, the novices, together with their parents stood in front of the temple. They received a blessing from the priest before the prayers commenced. At least one family had performed the ritual before them, and there was blood on the ground. A man brought an old rice bag that he cut open and placed on the ground where Supriya was standing so that she did not have to stand in the puddle of blood. Following the initial *puja*, the three boys sat inside the temple together with the priest. Many people had gathered for the event, and it was difficult for me to observe in detail what happened inside the temple.

When the novices and the priest were inside the temple performing *puja*, their parents and close relatives rang the bells that surround the temple for about half a minute. Following this, they began the *puja* involving the candle wicks (*lakhbatti*). The novices carried the candle wicks around the temple once. They were handed one each, and the older family members carried the others. After the first round, the candle wicks were lit, and they carried them two more rounds around the temple before they placed them at each corner of the temple, and in front of the temple entrance. The novices' parents helped them to carry the pots as they could be quite heavy and, when put on fire, potentially dangerous. The candle wicks burned for a little while, and the family priest chanted mantras and instructed the boys to perform the *puja*.

Afterward, the novices went around the temple and stirred around in the clay bowl with a thick bamboo stick looking for old coins that had been placed in the bottom of the bowls. Amita told me that these coins are important when one builds a house. They are seen as auspicious and function as a blessing for the house and it is good luck to include them in the foundation of the house.

3.3.2 The act of sacrifice

The sacrifice of animals to the gods are central in many of the religious practices among Hindus, be it an initiation ritual or a festival (Fuller, 2004). My Nepali teacher told me that this sacrificing actually comes from the Buddhist practice of being released of five weaknesses of the human. These were sacrificed through five different fruits that represented each of the five weaknesses; 'lust', 'greed', 'rage', 'attachment', and 'ignorance'. The symbols of sacrifice mustard (yellow and black), sesame (black), black *daal* (lentils) and sweet chickpeas. Hindus have converted these symbols to a representation of five animals. Because of this, my teacher says that Hinduism and Buddhism are the same in theory, however not in practice.

During the *brata banda* you can choose if you want to sacrifice or not. Supriya's father-in-law was determined on sacrificing for his three grandsons' *brata banda*. He had bought five animals to be sacrificed at the temple; one duck, one chicken, one sheep, one goat, and one buffalo. In an interview, Supriya explained that the sacrifice of animals was not that important to her, and said that it was not a rule. Lewis (1980) says that when people are aware of the rules, and only then can they make decisions whether they want to follow them or not.

The sacrificing ritual is not performed by the family priest, but by a hired professional sacrificer, especially when handling bigger animals like goats, sheep and buffalo (Fuller, 2004). Pramod, an informant, told me that it is seen as an impure act to do the sacrificing, and that is the reason why the priest does not partake in the actual sacrificing. The animal has to agree to the sacrificing. This is done after it receives the blessing from the priest. It is let loose from the ropes and able to move around without escaping. The sort of freedom is intended as a possibility for the animal to agree to being sacrificed. Thereafter, the priest pours some purified/holy water on the animal. This is to make the animal shake it off, which is the sign of agreement from the animal. After the ritual, the sacrificed animal is distributed among the family and *guthi*. Specific parts of the animal go to different family member and members of the *guthi*. When the specific parts are distributed, the rest of the animal is prepared for the oncoming *bhoj*, a feast, in which extended family and friends are invited to eat and drink with the family of the *brata banda* boys.



Plate 13: The sacrifice of a buffalo head. Photo: the author

The act of sacrifice varies from place to place. An informant was baffled when I told him about the sacrificing at the ritual I saw in Bhaktapur. He himself is from Patan, and he explained me that they do not perform the act of sacrifice.

The sacrificing sequence was started by the blessing of the boys. He recited mantras in the temple before the boys went outside. The animals then received their blessings with the boys standing next to the temple. The duck and the chicken received their blessing inside the temple, whereas the sheep and the goat were lifted in front of the temple for their blessing. Due to its size, the buffalo was blessed at the spot where it was tethered, thus not at the temple.

The boys stepped aside when the offering started. The sacrificial expert handled the animals when they have received the blessing from the priest and are loosened to give them room to accepted the sacrifice. Whenever an animal shook there was a cheer in the crowd, because the sacrificing cannot happen without the animal's consent. After the animals had accepted the sacrifice by shaking of the water, they were sacrificed

The duck and the chicken were sacrificed right outside the temple. Quickly, their heads were laid inside the temple and their bodies were carried around the temple once. The goat and the sheep were held almost inside the temple. Four men were holding them tight, and their back legs were on the outside of the temple, either on the ground or up in the air. Their throats were cut so that the blood was spilled on the picture of Ganesh. Thereafter, their bodies were carried around the temple in the same fashion as the duck and the chicken, but this time it left a blood trail around the temple. When they came to the front of the temple, the head was dismantled from the body and put inside the temple. A small part of the skin was put in the mouth of the animal and some intestine was blown up as a balloon before it was handed to the priest in the temple.

The buffalo was the last to be sacrificed. In all, five men had to participate to put it to the ground and drag it over to the temple. It did not seem like the buffalo got the option to agree to the sacrifice but that might just have been done when I was wandering around with the other spectators trying to find a place that would shield us from the blood splatting that was going to be everywhere. When the buffalo was placed in front of the temple the sacrificing started. As it was too big to be carried around the temple after the sacrifice, the sacrificial experts bent its head so it faced the back of the buffalo and that the throat was stretched and easily accessible. The sacrificer made an incision in the throat and started to pump its head further down in to the animals back. This was to make the blood splatter reach all the way to the roof of the temple. They did this for as long as it reached all the way to the roof, and when the squirting dabbed of

they let go and cut the head off. The buffalo then followed the same procedure as the sheep and the goat - some of its skin was cut off and put into its mouth. Finally, the head was put inside the temple with the rest of the heads from the sacrificed animals. Following the sacrificing, there are specific rules about who gets what piece of the sacrificed animals. These rules are implicit, but something that is followed regardless (Lewis, 1980). Supriya explains that they are distributed among the male family members, as well as the *guthi*.

When the sacrifice done by the boys' grandfather came to an end, other families came with goats that they sacrificed on behalf of the three boys. This was the extended family of the boys, that together had bought four goats for the sacrificing. Four goats were sacrificed before the next part of the ceremony started. This was the end of the animal sacrificing and of the ritual.

3.3.3 Becoming mature

The main event of the day marked the end of the ceremony day. Amita told me that changing from the orange loin cloth symbolized that the observer of the *brata banda* are old enough to wear real underwear. This marks that they have observed the ritual and counts as a *rite of reintegration* and a marker of the changed social status (van Gennep, 1960). Supriya told me that in the olden times, this was a more important practice than today, as children usually did not wear underwear before the *brata banda*. Today, the use of underwear is more common, but the changing of the loin cloth is still performed during the ritual. This is the last ritual to be performed for this ceremony. The boys are lead up to the temple together with their mothers and fathers and made to change in front of the whole crowd. The two older boys who were eight and nine years old seemed a little shy to do this, but the younger one who was only 22 months was not disturbed at all. They got changed and there was a cheer in the crowd. When they were properly dressed again, the priest recited some mantras and gave the last blessings to the boys. He then told them to wear the new clothes that their father had given them, which was a black suit. They kept their head dresses and the flower mala they had been wearing the whole day. This changing into the suit is a symbol of having completed the coming of age ceremony. This also marks the end of the ritual, and is the symbol of incorporation, the last stage of the rite of passage, according to van Gennep (1960). Now, the ritual entourage left the temple and made room for the next family to prepare for their ritual, and moved on to the school yard next door to indulge in the *bhoj*.

At the school yard there was a food service which was arranged for this special day. There were many families that were sitting around in different sections of the schoolyard. Straw

mats were rolled out and Amita found us a spot for us on the side. We sat down and waited for the food to be served. In the meantime, one of the male family members was walking around giving *tika* – a red mark on peoples' forehead, and a red string to put around the neck to mark that one had participated in the *brata banda*. Whilst sitting on the straw mats, lapte plates are distributed by the service people. Amita told me that lapte plates are used because they are pure, but I also imagine it being more convenient than regular plates as lapte pates are disposable, and serving many people, as one ritual entourage would count about 40 people.

The ritual entourage was served a typical Newar meal. Amita explained to me what was served. Beaten rice and multiple types of meat, vegetables, *batmas* (roasted soy beans), and local beer, soda and homemade rice liquor called *ayla*. Amita told me that typically, everyone waits for the last person to finish their food before they leave the mats. However, the senior male is allowed to leave when he pleases, as everyone respects the seniors (Toffin, 2007).

Before the meal begins, two women were walking around with a tray and a bowl for people to wash their hands. Amita told me that this was done to avoid a queue at the water tap, and also as a way to show respect to the ones that made it to the ritual. When we were done washing our hands, we started to eat as the food was already on our plates. While eating, we got constant refills and new dishes served to us. When we had finished our food, we washed our hands again and went to play with the somewhat impatient children. Amita politely said her goodbyes and we left to catch the bus back to Kathmandu.

*

Different Position, Different Interpretation

Himal, a 23-year-old man, was arguing with his mother about how to perform a ritual. They were performing a protection ritual for his father who is traveling in China, and Himal does not understand why he has to perform the ritual in the first place. His mother insists that he has to perform the ritual, as he is now the oldest male in the family when his father is not present:

*Now you go touch the cow dung
What did you just say, mom?
You have to touch the cow dung, your father is not here
But what good does it do?
You have seen your father do this so many times before
No, I don't want to!
Son, you go touch the cow dung
It's so unfair!
You are the oldest son, so it is your responsibility...
... But I don't want to touch the cow poop!*

Usually, when I asked youth informants about various rituals, they refer me to their seniors, be it their mother, father or grandparents. They do not have the authority to interpret the ritual symbols yet, because their position does not *allow* it. They might know the rules of a certain ritual or may be able to say something about the purpose, but when it comes to the deeper meanings, they refer to their seniors. In some ways, it is connected to showing respect to your senior. There is a strict hierarchy and seniors are the ones who possess power in the household, amongst other things. The ritual descriptions in chapter 3 show the level of articulation which adults display in the explanation of the ritual, its history and purposes, while youth, as will be shown in this chapter, have a different perspective. As we see in the example above, Himal questions the ritual when he does not see the purpose of it, while his mother has the perspective that this is one of the rules of the ritual, which has to be followed. Himal is currently the eldest male present family, which positions him such that this part of the ritual is his responsibility. His mother further draw attention to the fact that he has observed the *brata banda*. The emphasis of this chapter will be on exploring the difference interpretations between the cultural bearing adults and youth in their relation to the topics religion, ritual purposes, *jhuto*, ritual rules and social organization. Through the methodological theories of Turner (1967) we will see that these differences are grounded in youth and adults different position in society.

4.1 Religious Co-Existence

The Newars themselves ... do not seem to regard the distinction between 'Buddhists' and 'Hindus' as constituting a major cleavage within their community, and in the Newari language there are no terms exactly corresponding to the words 'Buddhist' and 'Hindu' (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956, p. 17).

The co-existence of Buddhism and Hinduism among the Newars have long been of special interest of western scholars (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956; Gellner, 1986, 2001; Gellner & Quigley, 1995; Lienhard, 1984; Locke, 1989), but it has never been of significant importance to the Newars themselves. As we know, the two religions Buddhism and Hinduism grew out of a shared cultural background in India centuries ago (Whelpton, 2005). Von Fürer-Haimendorf explains that as the Hindus are polytheistic and their worldview consists of numerous deities, and these are in Buddhism recognized as protectors of Buddha (Fürer-Haimendorf, 1956). Between Newar Buddhism and Hinduism, then, is a flexibility of categories, and no straight line between the two. Through this section it will be given an overview of how youth and adults relate to religion, both in terms of the co-existence and to religion overall.

As for the co-existence, and the debate about whether or not there is syncretism at play among the two religions, my Nepali teacher told me about the sacrifice of animals during the Hindu *brata banda* has a connection to Buddhism. She said that this practice comes from Buddhist tradition and their offering of five different seeds as a symbol of the five weaknesses of the human being. These weaknesses are called *kama*, *lobha*, *cradha*, *moha* and *ahankar*, and can be translated to, respectively, 'lust', 'greed', 'rage', 'attachment' and 'ignorance'. The Buddhists used black and yellow mustard seeds, black sesame seeds, black *daal* and sweet chickpea. The transition to how this came into the Hindu ritual of *brata banda* was not clear, but each of the five animals sacrificed, namely duck, chicken, sheep, goat and buffalo, each represent the underlying Buddhist weaknesses being sacrificed. According to my teacher this is connected to the idea that Buddhism and Hinduism in theory are inherently similar, but that their practice is different. The origin of the two religion are the same, and therefore it seems natural that there is some sharing of cultural heritage. In an interview, Sagar, a 29-year-old

banker of middle caste, said that he is both Hindu and Buddhist. When asked which kind of priest his family uses, he said a Vajracarya, a *gubaju*, which is the Buddhist priest. He said quickly that to him it really did not matter, he would anyway call himself both Hindu and Buddhist. To him there is no clear distinction. There is also a flexibility between the two religions, and Furer-Haimendorf (1956) explains it well:

Most of the important Hindu deities are recognized as 'protectors' of Buddha and his doctrine, and their cult forms part of the ritual performed at the great Buddhist shrines. Similarly Hindu temples are open to Buddhist worshippers, and at the great annual feasts Buddhist and Hindu Newars co-operate in the same ritual activities (Furer-Haimendorf, 1956, p. 18).

The most explicit example of this flexibility from the fieldwork in Kathmandu is the *bara*. Ramesh, the father of the girl observing the *bara* from chapter three, explained to me in an interview that they are Hindu Newar, but when Indu observed the *bara*, she spent three days and two nights in a Buddhist monastery. He explained that it traditionally is twelve days in a cave, but nowadays it is more and more common to have a shorter version of the *bara*, and having a short cut proses. This is because, from what Ramesh told me, they did not have time to do the ritual for a full twelve days, as well as they did not want to take their daughter out of school for two weeks. Because of this flexibility, they were able to schedule it around what is working best for them, and use the Buddhist option for the first portion of the ritual, and complete the ritual in the Hindu manner.

Supriya explained to me in an interview about the *brata banda* that the most important aspect of the ritual was that they young boy accepts his culture and religion. To her it is not important what he chose to do later in life, if he wanted to become a Christian or a Muslim, but that he accepts his religion and culture for what it is *now*, is important.

Through this we can see that to which religion one belongs to is not the most important aspect, but rather that the flexibility between the religions is central for Newar adults, as well as youth.

As we now have seen, there is a fluctuation and a flexibility between the two religions. At the same time, adults are aware what religion they belong to. Through the ritual *brata banda* one marks and confirm ones' religious identity through accepting the culture and religion in the ritual. There is certainly differences between youth as there is between any other people. In this

section the discussion will be from the perspective of what youth themselves articulate about their religiousness.

Dinesh and Sunil once started a big argument at a party we all went to. Sunil does not believe in any religion although he has observed the *brata banda* and comes from a predominantly Hindu family, and Dinesh could not believe that he was that “narrow minded” that he did not realize that there was something outside of our human world. They argued for quite a while, and did not come to a conclusion, but they talked about everything from religion being just a tradition, and to tradition being religion and to not be religious was to be not a Newar, and that if your father is Newar, then you are Newar and it doesn’t matter which religion you belong to, or if you belong to a religion at all.

Dinesh who is from the high caste called Shakya is clear about the fact that he is a Newar Buddhist. One of the first things he told me when we first met was the fact that his father had just been the priest at *kwa baha*, and seemed proud of this fact. He explained that he had been with him on various occasions to help his father out with a *puja*. While I stayed at the house in Patan, I woke up one morning thinking there was a marching band consisting of at least 20 wind players marching through the ground floor. I was not wrong. I went down stairs to seeing Dinesh standing there, laughing at me for coming down to the reception at 04:00 am looking like I had just been woken up by a marching band. He explained that there were about 250 people who were going to come though the reception that night, as they were celebrating something which I could not hear him explain over the loud sounds of the wind players, but he said he was there because his father did not have the opportunity to be there himself, that this was now his responsibility.

Sunil on the other hand, as mentioned, is not Hindu. He is brought up in a Hindu family and observed the *brata banda* when he was approximately 12 years old. In that sense he accepted his religion, but now he says that it is not so important to him. As explains, when he became more educated he realized that there is no way of confirming anything, and therefore, why should he believe in it? At the same time, once he came to the house in Patan, I saw that he was wearing *tika* and a red string around his neck, which is a blessing one gets as certain occasions in the temple. He said that that day was the *sithii nakha*, which is the well-cleaning day, and his mother really wanted him to come to the temple with him, so he went. He said he did it to respect his mother, even though he does not believe in the gods himself.

Other informants said that they did not really have a religion at all, like Aadi from Bhaktapur. He observed *brata banda* when he was about eleven-twelve years old, together with

his older brother and although he is raised in a Hindu family, but says that he has his own perspective on religion:

I don't want to follow my religion, I respect my religion, but I would not follow it fully because I don't think it would be good. I respect what I'm from. Leave it to me to do what I want. I don't really care about religion. I could go to church if I like to, I can eat cow if I want to, I have eaten cow! Religion is a waste of time. It is selfish to think about religion.

There are clear differences in how people identify with religion. From being clear about what religion one belongs to, to being open to both Buddhism and Hinduism, as well as distancing oneself from the family religion, and to completely dissociate oneself from any religion. At the same time, all of my informants with whom I have talked about these kinds of thematic have all gone through the initiation to the religion and culture.

4.2 The Articulation of Ritual Purpose

The rites of passage among the Newars have two purposes which I have chosen to *upbringing* and *conditions for upbringing*. As we have seen through chapter three, adults are articulate in their ritual descriptions and interpretation of the purposes of the ritual, while youth depend on seniors to a larger extent. Through this section I shall view how youth and adults interpret the purpose of rites of passage and take a closer look to how they are different.

Rituals have many meanings, but they are not necessarily understood by all. Some may be known in the community through tradition, and there might be differences within a society. The difference between youth and adults may lay in the experience of what a ritual purpose display. What is achieved through a ritual is what Richards (1988) call expressed purpose. The variety of explanations from participants shows us that there is not a clear answer to this question within the local exegesis. The purpose may have different levels, which Richards (1988) calls primary and secondary purpose. As a generality, the purposes of the life cycle rituals among the Newars primarily *upbringing* and secondary the *conditions for upbringing*. For example, during *ihī* the girl learns how to do *puja* and break *daal*, and this would be a part of the primary purpose, that they learn how to participate in the household. As for secondary purpose, rituals among the Newars puts in play social hierarchy based on economics. This gives a legitimized space to display the conditions for the upbringing, in this case, for the child, and

to assume ones' socio-economic status in the society. Through conversations with my youth informants, I discovered that many of them did not consider the secondary purpose of the rituals. This differentiation is important to the adults because they have experience with it. This can also be seen in relation to caste where youth have a more relaxed relationship to caste, as we will see later in this chapter, and adults tend to consider caste and its implications to a higher degree than the youth.

What is achieved when observing for example *ihī* and *bara*? Most informants, youth and adult, explained that the purpose was so that the girl would not become a widow and would have to perform *sati* when her mortal husband dies, and that it is an old tradition that they continue to follow. Earlier, a practice that was performed throughout Nepal and India was that when a husband died, his wife had to jump on his funeral pyre, to sacrifice herself “in the name of love”, to show her eternal loyalty to him. In Nepal, as well as India, a widows' social status is quite low. In general, women are subordinate men in merely every aspect of life, which makes their social status dependent on their husband. In the same way, a woman's social and economic position in society is dependent on her parents before marriage. This is what the Newars want to bypass by making their daughters observe *ihī* and *bara*, and this is a purpose commonly known. Uditā, one of my adult informants, explained why the *bara* was primarily for not becoming a widow, even though *sati* is not practiced anymore:

This has to do with the social status of the women and that it is dependent on the husband and can. If she is still married to the sun, she will therefore not be a widow, and is not looked down-upon in society. The husband that she marries in in the *bara* is the sun, a symbol of Shiva, which is the source of life on our planet and the sun never dies, so the girl will never become a widow.

This description of the ritual purpose of both *ihī* and *bara* is something in which my youth informants would agree with. We can see this through the *brata banda* as well, where Supriya explained that the observers of the ritual accept the religion and culture, youth explained it as becoming a grown-up Newar. Supriya's explanation and interpretation is more articulate than what the youth informants would say, but the essence of it is the same.

On the other hand, as we have seen Richards (1988) explain, and which Turner (1967) agrees with, is that this knowledge varies with social position. My teacher, who can be considered to be a senior, had another explanation, which involves the Muslim invasion from the early 1200s CE. My teacher explains:

During the invasion, the Muslim warriors went to families around Kathmandu valley and took unmarried daughters and married them and kept them away from the family. Other ethnic groups would mark their girls with sindur without them being married, but the Newars took action and made a ritual, which would mean that the girls were actually married. This way, when the Muslims caught up on the fact that people were lying to them, the Newars could honestly say that they were married.

Moreover, she explained that nowadays it is common to say that it is done so that the girl observing the *ihī* does not become a widow, deriving on the old practice of *sati* where the wife had to jump on her husband's funeral pyre. We can see from this that youth are aware of the purposes of the rituals, but because there is more emphasis on the adults' part in the ritual, they may be more aware of what they express as cultural bearers.

4.2.1 The undiscovered purpose

One of my informants, Muskan, who is a mother of one of the girls from the *ihī*, stated with importance in an interview that her daughter and her niece had the fifth and sixth position during the ritual. She explained that they therefore were leaders and respected by the rest of the girls observing the ritual. She added that the nine principal girls pay more than the rest, and there is usually more pressure for them to wear more jewelry. If we look to (Richards, 1988) and expressed purpose, this is a clear indicator of the secondary purpose and how one can show one's social and socio-economic status through life cycle rituals. In my experience this would not be the reason why youth would dismiss life cycle rituals for their future children. The explanations do not contain evidence that they do not want to state their social status, but rather that their children will have the choice themselves if they want to for example observe the *brata banda* and accept the family religion.

Through the rituals, there are certainly elements in which the parents of the novices are in position to show the conditions for upbringing. As we have seen in chapter three, both for the *bara* and *brata banda* there is a procession to the temple in which the ritual is performed. This can be seen as an arena where parents are able to show to the surroundings, here especially neighbors, the conditions for upbringing of the novice or novices. These elements of the rituals were only brought to my attention by adults, both explicitly and implicitly.

4.3 “You Should Respect Your Elders”

As Bucholtz (2002) says: ‘the role of the adult is important in the rite itself’, we can see this as adults being the cultural bearers, they are the ones who are supposed to know the chronology of the ritual, as well as educate the novices of the ritual. Through this section the reader will see how seniority affects the flow of knowledge and how youth rely to the elders to possess the knowledge of the rituals, as well as how respect to elders is shown among the Newar youth.

Broadly speaking, youth is not in position to interpret rituals, it is for the prerogative elders to explain ritual symbols and events. Because of the multivocal ritual symbols, there are endless ways of interpret the rituals, and this responsibility lies with the seniors. Throughout the fieldwork, when I would ask a youth informant about a specific ritual, they would refer me to one of their seniors for further details, especially when they felt uncertain. Through the interpretations of purpose for the performed rituals, youth can give an overview of the purpose of the ritual, but the deeper meaning of the ritual is for the elders to determine.

As we have seen through Gellner (1992) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1956) the authority of the seniors manifests in various ways, and that seniors often have prominent roles through the rituals. During the *bara* it was Ramesh’s elder sister Daya who was the ritual master. During *ihi*, *guruma*, who is the wife of the priest, and seen as a senior, was the ritual assistant to the priest, and the one who interacted with the novices. In this way, they are the ones to carry the culture, the ones who are cultural bearers, transmitting it to the next generations.

One of my informants, Aadi has quite an explicit example of this respect for seniors, and in this case, parents. During my fieldwork in Kathmandu valley, Aadi’s father had been diagnosed with cancer, and after I had returned to Norway he sadly passed away. I had a short interview with Aadi and his wife in April 2018, four months after the funeral. He explained that there was a difference the motivation for what he wanted to do, and what his mother and the *guthi* wanted him to do. He explained that everything he did was to respect his parents, while his mother had the aspect of also respecting the gods. Among his brothers, they decided that only the oldest of the brothers would wear white for a year, which is a tradition kept by Newars to honor the deceased. This shows that even though Aadi does not have any religion, but that he chooses to respect his parents by doing what he is asked by his mother and the *guthi*, but does it explicitly for this reason.

4.4 Impurity as a Symbolic Marker of Hierarchy

Through rites of passage, there is an emphasis on what is pure and impure. It can be a person, an action or an object. Douglas (2003) explores the cultural notion of dirt and its symbolic meaning. In the introduction we saw that this symbolic meaning is socially dependent and we could argue that *jhuto* is cultural matter determined by actual and symbolic markers. I will now give some examples of how youth and adults differentiate in how they understand and use *jhuto* when it concerns food and drinks, and menstruation.

On many occasions I ate food together with my informants, and had a variety of experiences with what was considered *jhuto*, and there was a big difference between youth and adults. Suresh told me about his notion of *jhuto*. He said that *jhuto* is there for the high castes to differentiate themselves from the lower castes: “It is there to make fun of people”. This is an example where we can see the symbolic marker of the high castes and how they affirm that the lower caste is more *jhuto* than themselves. But at the same time it is optional when this happens, and thus socially dependent. Suresh follows with an example: “If people are out having a good time together, maybe they have had a few beers, a plate of *aluu*, potato, is not necessarily *jhuto*, but if one might not have such a good time, or maybe it is a formal setting, the plate of *aluu* would definitely be *jhuto*.”

At the third day of the *ihī*, I was invited to partake in a *bhoj* at Amita's mother's house. After a full day of preparing food, the senior women, both within the family, and neighbors, sat down at the roof top terrace. They were about eight or nine women sitting on straw mats along the walls waiting to be served food. Amita explains that they have to be served, as they eat with their hands and will be polluted when they start to eat. Therefore, they cannot touch the cutlery and serve themselves when they eat. Since I had nothing to do at the time, I was put to serve the senior women sitting on the straw mats outside on the roof top terrace. They all had plates in front of them made of either tin or copper, which is what people use in Nepal. I get handed a dish, it is *aluu*, and there is a big ladle and I get instructed to start on the left side of the row of hungry women. I give the first one a spoon full and place it on her plate, but I have obviously done something wrong! The women start speaking to me with high voices in Newar, and I do not understand anything. Amita takes the ladle from me before I place it back in to the bowl of *aluu*, and explains to me that the ladle cannot touch the plate I am serving, and that was what I had done. The ladle was polluted now and had to be washed, and if I had placed it back into the bowl, all the *aluu* would be polluted to and would have been thrown out. I wash the ladle and try again, while the women sitting and waiting for the *aluu* look at me and try not to laugh.

Someone says in Nepali “*bideshi*” – foreigner and “*tickchha*” – it’s OK in a funny but resigned tone of voice, like they are saying “well, she doesn’t know any better, she is just a foreigner”. I try again, and this time I do it right, and get recognition through many of the women expressing an acknowledging “*la* – it’s done”. After the meal Amita explains that it is not just because it was I who did it, they would have done the same with her.

In the opposite end of the scale I found that the youth was really relaxed about *jhuto*. For example, when I came to a restaurant with some youth informants and ordered Newar food, it would be ordered by plate with individual dishes on so we would end up with four or five dishes shared by maybe three or four people. The dishes would be served with a plate of beaten rice, and two spoons, which was all shared between men and women, high and low caste, between the youngest and the oldest in the group, whoever was present and was hungry. In the former example, I would imagine the senior women being faint at heart by seeing this, but to my youth informants, this was how they did it, they shared their food.

In these examples we see a massive divide between the youth and adults and how they relate to food-pollution. The contamination is socially dependent which makes it relative (Douglas, 2003). Among youth, there is no reason to emphasize the symbolic marker, because it is not something that they care about in other aspects of life, so why do it with food? This also comes to display when we now are going to take a closer look at *jhuto* in relation to menstruation, as well as in relation to caste, which will be presented later in this chapter.

4.4.1 The impurity of women

Menstrual impurity limits woman in their everyday life. Alderson describes it well:

I started my period yesterday. What a big thing this natural process is here. In the Brahmin caste, this involves strict taboos and rituals. By body and possessions are considered *jhuto* (or “dirty”) for four days once starting. I can’t go into the kitchen, temples or the dining room ... No one can touch my cup to refill it; only Sunita can fill another class, then empty that one into mine after I have placed it on the floor or table (Alderson, 2017: October 14, 1999: I am *jhuto*).

One morning when Amita had told me that we could go to a *sraddha*, which is a ritual performed after a person has passed away, she knocked on my door and asked if I was on my period, and I was, so I told her yes. This resulted in her telling me I could not come because I was polluted, *jhuto*, and that it would contaminate the whole ritual. In the same way, she could

not enter the area in which the *ihī* was held, because she was menstruating. As a matter of fact, Muskan asked me during the ritual where Amita was, because I had come before her, and she seemed quite upset that she had not arrived yet. When I told her that she was menstruating, she said quickly “ah, I understand, *tikchha* – OK”.

The days of the month when Amita was menstruating she could not perform any of these daily rituals, as she was impure. She explained that it is different how long one has to wait from the first day of menstruating to different gods. Some require a full eight days, while others only four or five. When Amita is menstruating her older daughter Nirupa would sometimes do the worship and *puja* instead of Amita doing it herself, other times it was simply just not done. Also offering to the fire god was not done if she had made the food, because then the food was impure and could not be offered to the gods. If Deepak or I had made the food and she had not touched it, we could still offer it to the gods. These days she could not go to the temple or do anything concerning the gods. She told me that in some families it is also really strict about women not being allowed into the kitchen area even, but to them this was not that important.

Most of the youth informants would agree with this last statement, that *jhuto* to them is not that important. As we saw above concerning sharing food, they have the same towards menstruating women, and Aadi expressed it like this in an interview:

All these women and girls cannot touch and go inside the temple and do *puja* when they have their period – why, I don’t know, I just know that they follow this tradition. These kind of stuff is not only Newar, but in any Nepali culture. You cannot just go inside the temple or whatever. I don’t understand why having one’s period makes one impure. I really don’t know why.

This attitude towards the impurity of the menstruation is not just with regards to religion and tradition, it is the same with handling food. Badal, another youth informant, said that he did not understand why menstruating women could not handle food – they are usually the best cooks he said. He said that when he was younger, whenever his mother was menstruating, he was counting the days when he would have her cooking again.

4.5 The Significance of Ritual Rules

Through the rites of passage among the Newars, adults as well as youth are aware of the rules at play. In anthropology we know that many types of actions are guided by norms and unwritten

rules. These guide peoples' actions subconsciously. An area in which people *are* conscious about the rules at play is during the ritual. People are aware that there is a certain order which one has to follow, and it is from this awareness the participants in a ritual can discuss the rules at play or even fight about whether or not what they are doing is the right sequence or not. This comes naturally, as everyone relates to ritual rules, and contrary to local exegesis, ritual rules are common. The degree of involvement in the ritual is different between generations. Adults have a natural position as tutors during the life cycle rituals, and this involvement promotes loyalty to tradition and rules, while youth to a larger extent are free to define their place in the ritual. Throughout the rituals I was able to observe, adults generally had this role as a tutor and was active in the ritual, while youth were seldom present, or did not partake actively in what was going on. This section will take a closer look upon the consciousness of the ritual rules, and how they are different between the generations.

4.5.1 Knowledge of ritual rules

In many cases the knowledge of these rules may be implicit, and one's proper partaking in a certain ritual demands this implicit knowledge for performance, and in addition knowledge of social organization, including social status and identity (Lewis, 1980). As I mentioned in the introduction, people are aware that their ritual actions are guided by rules, this often becomes the topic of conversation during the ritual. One prominent example I referred to of this was that during *ihi*, where the mothers guided their daughters in performing *puja* with instructions from the priest. When they were uncertain, they often asked others what to do, and others in turn asked them back and it was the topic of conversation between the participants, as well as the priest gave instructions on what to do over the microphone.

Another aspect of ritual rules is that when one is aware of the rules, one is also able to negotiate them. As we saw in chapter three, during the *ihi* the girls were fasting, but were hungry, so their mothers gave them sweets. The adults here know that they are not following the book, but adjust to the contemporary context and relevance, and as Lewis (1980) says, everyone is aware of the rules, and chooses how to relate to them within the context in which they are to be enforced.

In an interview with Supriya where we talked about *brata banda*, she explained that many aspects of the ritual are optional, while others are mandatory. This emphasis on the rules at play when describing the ritual confirms what talks about when he says that rules are a central part of what people talk about when talking about rituals (Lewis, 1980). Supriya said that her father-in-law wanted to sacrifice animals at his grandsons *brata banda*, and they had therefore done

so. He was the one who bought the animals and hired the sacrificial experts that they needed for the ritual. She said that to her it was not so important to do the sacrifice, but that her father-in-law wanted to give a special blessing to his three grandsons, and wishing them a long and happy life. Even though it is an optional part of the rituals, there are certain rules that needs to be followed, for example, the different parts of the sacrificed animals, the head, tail, feet and so on, are distributed to specific family members, older brother, younger brother, father, uncle, while the rest of the animal is used for the upcoming feasts, *bhoj*.

Youth are aware that there are rules in play when talking about rituals. For example, Dinesh emphasized the rules of when a girl dies during a *bara* when I asked him about this particular ritual. He said that she cannot be taken out the door, and therefore they make holes in the wall to get her out. If she is not on the ground floor, they do not carry her body down the stairs, but makes holes in the floor boards. He explained that this is to make sure that the spirit if the girl is not stuck in the house.

Suresh, who is a 24-year-old man from Kathmandu, told me about his experience observing the *brata banda* and that he had a dispute with his priest. In contrast to other informants, he has been living abroad with his family during his childhood which made it so that he did not observe his *brata banda* until he was 16 years old. Because of him being influenced by growing up in an international environment and going to international schools, he did not agree with all the traditions that was related to the *brata banda*. What they did not agree upon was what to do with all the rice that would be offered to the priest, and that Suresh wanted to donate it to the less fortunate, who could not afford rice themselves. In the end, they did not agree, and because the priest is the one to make the decisions towards the ritual, he kept the rice for himself, as is the custom. One thing Suresh managed to get through was that he wanted no animal sacrifice, which his grandfather wanted. Through this example we can see that Suresh negotiated what he did not like about the ritual and traditions to fit to his world view and desires. Even though he did not succeed to get everything he wanted, he was clear on what he wanted and not.

Rules also make a ritual recognizable. As Lewis (1980) says, the rules are public, and not personal or individual, and because of its formality participant are able to identify a ritual: “We recognize the performance of a ritual like the performance of a play or a piece of music” (Lewis, 1980, p. 22). On various occasions my informants would hear music or see people in the streets and inform me what kind if ritual this was. For example, during lunch time when I lived with Amita and her family we could sit on the roof terrace drinking black tea, and once in a while we heard marching bands playing in a street nearby and Amita would then say

something like “Oh, someone is getting married” or “oh... someone died”, indicating that there was a wedding or funeral held and recognizing only by listening to it, not even seeing it. Other times, when I lived at the house in Patan, I would sit outside on the pavement with some of the informants which would be there, watching the streets and chatting. If there was something happening in the street they would tell me to go get my notebook and follow them because there was a ritual happening. They would often recognize it as a *jhanko* or *brata banda*, but if they were uncertain, they asked the neighbors or anyone senior they could find.

4.5.2 “I don’t understand the meaning of this”

Recognition of ritual relates to the fact that the purpose of the action and its instrumentality is not apparent (Lewis, 1980). The use of an everyday object or action, composed in such a way it is not recognized, implying an underlying meaning is what Lewis calls instrumental rationality, and it is from this, not immediately understanding what the meaning of the particular action which defines the ritual (ibid.). This instrumental rationality may cause different interpretations of the action performed and assign it more significant symbolic meaning than what is intended, just by the fact that the instrumental rationality indicated that there is a meaning, that there is something with this action or object that must communicate something which is not apparent.

Many youth informants would try explaining a ritual, and end up saying something like “But they do so many weird things”. They see something that they do not understand in the ritual, and anticipate that there is a meaning behind it, and therefore know it is a ritual. Most informants knew that during *ihi*, the novices grind lentils. This is a daily action which women do, but as we saw in chapter three, during *ihi*, they grind the lentils with their feet. As for adult and senior informants, many of them had some kind of explanation, like my Nepali teacher, which says it is a symbol of the household education.

4.6 Relating to Social Organizations

As we have seen in chapter three, during the *brata banda*, the novices get initiated in to the *guthi* and caste. In a way, they get initiated into the adult world of Newars, even though they may be as young as two years old. This initiation into the *guthi* rather a symbol of being a part of the social organization among the Newar, and the novice is from this point officially a part of his father’s caste and lineage as well, according to my informant Ramesh.

Being a member of the *guthi* implies certain duties, as we have seen in chapter one. The *guthis* function as a social organizer, for doing maintenance work, but also for being in charge of temple duty and being an essential part of the cremation when people pass away. When the Newar boy gets initiated through the *brata banda*, this becomes part of his duty as well.

As we saw in the first chapter, scholars have long been arguing about the position of caste, and Gellner (1986, 1992, 2007) argues it is the most important aspect of a person's religious identity. The definition of the term caste derives from three characteristics; separation in marriage, division in labor, and hierarchy (Dumont, 1970). Caste among the Newar is different from caste as we know it in India. For example, the rules of inter-caste marriage is not as strict, but there are social implications. Maya is a mother of two boys and comes from Bhaktapur. She is brought up in a traditional Hindu family, with three older brothers. She is in her mid-thirties and married to a Newar of same caste as herself, middle high caste. During the interview about the *brata banda* we talked about *guthi* and caste, and she explained that she would have a hard time accepting if her sons would find wife's that would have lower caste. If it would be more than two castes down, it she would not accept it at all. When I asked why, she said it would implicate her life as well as her sons' life, because if she would have to have a less pure daughter in law living in her house, there would be restrictions for her as well, especially during rituals and festivals. A practical example of this happened to one of my informants when he was younger. He had a girlfriend of a lower caste, while he himself is a Vajracarya. When his father found out about their relationship, he commanded that they end it and threatened that he would beat him up if he did not do as he said, and my informant had no option other than to end the relationship.

Through these examples, the adults have a clear cut expectation that intermarriage affects their life in a way that the youth does not inhabit yet. As adults have experienced the differentiation happening concerning caste, their worries of the change life become more apparent in relation to their children's choosing of a spouse. The fact that a lower caste is *jhuto* affects this as well, because it would mean that there is, when having sons, going to move in a person who is less pure than what their caste is today. This means differentiation through the rituals that are performed, in society, as the way ones' social status is perceived is legitimized through life cycle rituals.

Kumar is a 31-year-old Newar from Kirtipur with an interesting story. He is brought up, like Supriya, in a traditional Hindu family of seven, two sisters and two brothers. He is the youngest of the five. His family is of *Pode* caste, untouchable caste of cleaners, but the two youngest brothers have the last name Shrestha. When his three oldest siblings were young, his

parents did not have a lot of money, but when him and his brother were born, they had the money to send them to a different school, as he explains it, a good school and a good environment. To make sure that they were not bullied, the parents changed the two youngest boys last name to give an illusion that they were of higher caste. He explains:

It does not make as much difference today, but if it was at the time of my parents, it would have been much more pressure of what work they could do. If they were not *Pode*, they could have done different jobs, but I think they were poor at that time, so they could not afford to do anything else. I think my parent were thinking to work hard and do different jobs than what they used to. They tried everything they could do good for us. I think it was wrong, but they meant it in a good way. It is not easy to change now.

From this example, we can see that his parents did everything they could so that their two youngest children would be able to have another upbringing and more opportunities than what they had themselves, and what their older brother and sisters had. He says himself that it is not that important to him, and that he would be proud to be a *Pode*, but because it says in his birth certificate, as well as all his other documents that he is a *Shrestha*, it is difficult to do something about it. Kumar also tells me that this is not something that most of his friends know of, but not because it he is trying to keep it a secret, but because it does not important to him or his friends what caste someone is. This again shows the experience of differentiation for Kumar's parents. They have experienced firsthand what this entails, and choose to give them a different output. Rosser (1966) calls it individual social mobility, which involved the quitting of ones caste for another higher in the scale.

Youth informants, when asked about caste, the general response was that it was an ancient practice, something that happened and belonged in the past. Amit, a 27-year-old musician from a pure middle caste explained that the caste system was made so that people would do different work, and that people would know what they were supposed to do. Sunil, a 25-year-old artist claimed that caste will eventually disappear, and that amongst friends, caste is not important at all. He said that it is somewhat more difficult when it comes to marriage, but in the end people usually get to marry the ones they want. At the same time, Amit's girlfriend, Sumita, had not told her father about their relationship. Sumita and Amit is the same age, both educated and do creative work, him as a musician and her as a photographer. What differentiates them is that Sumita is somewhat higher caste than Amit, and she is afraid that her father will

not accept their relationship if he finds out. On the other hand, I interviewed Sumita's father, and he claimed that caste would not matter for him, as long as Sumita would be happy and her future husband would be good to her. To me it would be interesting to know the reaction from Sumita and her father when she decides to tell him about their relationship, and as for now, we can just speculate on this particular example through Mead's famous quote: "What people say, what people do, and what they say they do are entirely different things".

We can see from this that adults have a more confined concept of caste, while youth do not consider caste as an obstacle in the same way. Where adults concern caste as something that will limit their "existence", youth see it as more of an enrichment that they can get to know what aspects of Newar culture and traditions that they do not know from before through friends, and maybe potential spouses, of different castes, and do not consider it an obstacle.

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Final Remarks

Succinctly put, I claim to have shown that there is a distinct difference in how youth and adults interpret the various rites of passage. This thesis has not been a study of youth as a distinct social category in a society, but an exploration of the differences that makes a difference in the interpretation of the rites of passages. We have seen that on various topics, the interpretation and the involvement of youth have varied significantly from the adults. I have argued that the differences in interpretation is primarily due to their positions in society and roles in the rituals.

These are the major differences:

1) *Religious co-existence*: Academics and researchers have discussed whether the Newars are subject to syncretism. The Newars themselves do not question whether their religion is syncretic or not. They do not see it as a problem, and practice both Buddhism and Hinduism. The religious identity of the Newars is tied to its eclectic elements. The flexibility of the religions in how they can mix and match with what suits them and their situation the best, has become prominent through this thesis. At the same time, there is a difference between youth and adult in how they perceive and practice religion. We have seen that youth have a tendency to make choices based on their own wishes instead of following their parents.

2) *Purposes*: The stated purposes of the rituals are more articulated among the adults, and youth depend on their seniors for the interpretation of the ritual purposes. Even though they may know the purpose, they do not have the same level of articulation. When youth have observed their initiation rites, there are certain requirements for them to participate.

3) *Seniority*: Youth are not in position to interpret the ritual, and refer to seniors when asked about rites of passages. They do this because the task of interpreting the ritual is assigned to the seniors. This affects the involvement and the loyalty to the ritual and traditions, and is coherent with the other topics discussed. The youth category is prone to negotiate their position and trying to find their place in society, but they still have respect for their seniors.

4) *Jhuto*: There is a clear distinction between how youth and adults view *jhuto*. While adults are strict, youth are lenient. This becomes clear with regards to food and drinks. Adults are strict when asserting something as *jhuto*, whereas youth may understand that a certain thing is *jhuto*, but dismisses it because it may not be convenient.

5) *Rules*: The relation to rules may be said to be the opposite from *jhuto*, because with more knowledge and background of the rules of a ritual, you can also make a decision on which to follow and which is to be skipped. Youth do not possess this level of knowledge (yet) and may therefore be more bound to the ritual rules than the adults, as they do not make the decision.

6) *Social organization*: Through the initiation rites, the child is initiated into the *guthi* and caste. Adults are maintaining the social system, even though it is confined and limiting to themselves. Youth on the other hand talk about, especially, caste as an ancient practice which is no longer reflected in society. Youth, on the other hand, talk about caste as an ancient practice. Caste is viewed rather as an enrichment than an obstacle for youth.

We have seen that the most extensive work done solely on rites of passage among the Newars is Gutschow and Michaels. Through their approach they are able to attain detailed ritual descriptions and to give a good overview of the rituals, including both the layman's and the priest's perspective. Gutschow and Michaels (2005, 2008, 2014) have attained this kind of material by dismissing the works of van Gennep and Turner. However, my thesis has shown that my approach differs from theirs. I have interpreted the rituals according to van Gennep's (1960) rites of passage and Turner's (1967) theory of symbols, including his perspective on local exegesis. A focus on the difference of meaning among the actors, and the identification of the different interpretations between youth and adults was an added value of using van Gennep and Turner to analyze the material, compared to the Gutschow and Michaels' representation of the life cycle rituals among the Newar.

5.1 Final Reflections and Further Research

I would never have been able to understand the complex social composition of Nepal without doing any fieldwork, and I do not think that literature alone would have given me the insight that I now have. However, while completing my thesis, I am struck by a sense of shortcoming. I continue to ask myself; Did I get it all? I trust that I have managed to paint a picture of the Newars within their context, and hopefully I have been able to advocate the complexity of Newar culture. But I cannot help but ask myself: Am I reducing the Newars to something graspable for myself? – am I missing out on the big picture? After all, I acknowledge that I am only scratching the surface of something bigger.

Through working with this thesis the idea about continuous observations and fieldwork among the youth informants has struck my mind more than once. Following their evolution from being youth through becoming adults and cultural bearers would be interesting in light of this thesis. To see how they educate their children, and how they relate to rites of passages when reaching adulthood. A comparative study of youth in relation to rites of passages, not only within Nepal, and among different the ethnic groups of Nepal, but throughout the world. The differences in interpretation between generations would be an interesting extension. An exploring of these differences in relation to categories such as education level and occupation would be fruitful to compliment the findings of this thesis. In addition, internal and external motivations and circumstances as determining for the way in which adults educate their children about religion, rituals, culture and traditions could open up for new perspectives to the anthropological production of knowledge.

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