

**TUNSURIBAN**  
**Shamanism in the Chepang of Southern and Central Nepal**

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**Shamanism in the Chepang of Southern and Central  
Nepal**

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To my mother and father

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## Introduction

The environmental, climactic and cultural conditions prevailing in the kingdom of Nepal make it a particularly fertile terrain for research in many fields. One of these is the field of ethnology which has developed greatly over the last few decades, much of the interest being directed at the more than fifty different ethnic groups present in this small Himalayan country.

The hospitality and trust shown by the local people has greatly facilitated anthropological research though this has been complicated by difficult geographical, climatic and sanitary conditions. It is, however, these conditions which have allowed the country to remain isolated and independent despite its geographical location between the two superpowers, China and India.

The remoteness of villages and communities has allowed cultures and secular religions to be preserved. Despite inevitable contact with other greater and more complex religions, these have retained their autonomy and have even generated extremely interesting new cultural and religious forms. Difficulties encountered in carrying out field research have resulted in there still being ethnic groups which have not been studied in any detail. Some of these groups may even be almost unknown.

This work will focus on one of these ethnic groups; the Chepang or - as it is known at present, and which we will examine later - the Praja and more particularly the form of Shamanism present in this group.

As we know, the term Shamanism is held to mean a group of beliefs and ritual practises which are based on the possibility of there being a direct relationship between men and divinities or spirits. This relationship is effected by a religious expert mainly through alterations in states of consciousness which will from now on be referred to as trances.<sup>1</sup>

Shamanism can be found in many parts of the world: from Northern Eurasia to North and South America and thereon also in Australia and Oceania. The origins of Shamanism are probably to be found in Siberia and Central Asia, from where, according to Ugo Marazzi, the two most important forms of sincretistic Shamanism derive:

‘Central Asia and Southern Siberia have, in the course of history, been open to influences by almost all the major religions (Christianity, Mazdaism, the Jewish faith, Buddhism, Islam, Manichaeism) and to the sedentary cultures of the southern peoples. Islam and Buddhism have had a deep and lasting influence on the culture and religious concepts of Central Asia, mainly on the Turks and Mongols. The impacts of Islam and Buddhism on the original forms of Shamanism practised by the Kazaks, Kirgis, Uzbeko-Tajiks and Uighurs on the one hand and by the Mongolians, Buriats, Yellow-Uighurs on the other hand has meant that there are two forms of sincretistic Shamanism, one of which is Islamic Shamanism (predominately Sufi), the other being Buddhist Shamanism (Lamaistic), characterised by the persistant prevalence of Shamanist ideology in the form of the dominating religion.’<sup>2</sup>

The term shaman, which is taken from the Tungus language (*saman*) and may even be derived from the Sanscrit terms *sramana* and *sramanera*, denoting ascetic buddhist and monk respectively, describes the person in generally small communities who is responsible for communicating with the spirits, gods and forefathers. The shaman is usually also a diviner, therapist and psychopomp and it is he who accompanies dead souls to the world of their forefathers. He is also the custodian of the local myths and

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<sup>1</sup> See the chapter on .

<sup>2</sup> Marazzi U. 1990. *Testi dello sciamanesimo siberiano e centroasiatico*. Milan: pp.22-23 (first edition, Turin, 1984: UTET)(My translation).

therefore of the culture of the group to which he belongs. In groups of hunters and gatherers, he is usually the only person who can propitiate and therefore lead the hunt.

It is not always possible to find shamans who carry out all the above functions, in most cases the religious expert will only fulfil a few of these functions, leaving the remaining functions to be carried out by other individuals.

To return to the issue at hand, even in Nepal it is difficult to find one *jhakri* (T231b) - the Nepali term for the shaman- who fulfills all the abovementioned functions though almost all the groups have one or more religious experts who have many of the characteristics attributed to the shaman. This is obviously the result of the impact of the other greater religions such as Hinduism or Lamaistic Buddhism on Shamanism or more precisely *Jhankrism*. For example, in many communities the *jhakri* have retained their role of diviner or therapist though not that of the psychopomp (as with the Sherpas and Tamangs) and it is in fact the lama or Hindu priest who is responsible for conducting funerals.

The Chepang present a totally different picture and this was one of the main reasons for my interest in this group. The shaman actually fulfills all the abovementioned functions, even that of presiding over all rites of passage. The only possible anomaly which could be attributed to Chepang Shamanism is that it may cover too many functions. The *pande* - Chepang for the shaman - will generally also<sup>3</sup> preside over the purification of newly born babies or rites of passage which take place during infancy and adolescence though this is quite rare or perhaps undocumented for other Nepali groups. A. Macdonald was one of the first to study *Jhankrism* and is the first person to have defined it:

‘The *jhakri*, however, appears to be the very vehicle of a certain Nepali traditionalism. He is a person who falls into a trance, during which time voices speak through his person, thereby enabling him to diagnose illnesses and sometimes cure them, give advice for the future and clarify present events in terms of their relationship to the past. He is therefore both a privileged intermediary between spirits (who cause and cure illness) and men ; between the past, present and future ; between life and death, and most importantly between the individual and a certain social mythology.’<sup>4</sup>

Many studies have since been carried out into *Jhankrism* and its various aspects and forms within the different ethnic groups. A selection of the best articles written on the subject was compiled by Jhon Hitchcock and Rex L. Jones in a volume which gives a good overall picture of those religions where altered states of consciousness are used in the area of the Himalayas, in particular Nepal (*Spirit Possession in The Nepal Himalayas*, Warminster, 1976).

Religion governs all aspects of life and activity in Nepal, whose King is considered to be a reincarnation of the god Visnu and each and every act, however insignificant, is in some way related to the supernatural. Anyone who studies any of the Nepali ethnic groups, whatever his theoretical direction may be, will note this dimension which is in fact the key to understanding other phenomena.

The Chepang are particularly interesting from this point of view.

Up to around twenty years ago, the Chepang were nomadic<sup>5</sup> hunters and gatherers and now live in difficult conditions because of several factors: the sudden and forced

<sup>3</sup> As we will see later, though the *pande*'s presence is usually preferred, he may in certain cases be replaced by the head of the family during some of the more family orientated rites of passage.

<sup>4</sup> Macdonald, A.W. 1962. Notes préliminaires sur quelques du Muglan. *Journal Asiatique*. Paris: pp. 107 - 139.

<sup>5</sup> It is not possible to provide any specific information here as the Chepang are dispersed over a relatively vast territory and the transition from an economy based on hunting and gathering to an

interruption of any hunting activity, enforced sedenterisation, still only accepted by a few, and sudden entry into the caste system of the country, of course, at the lowest levels.

It must be noted the caste system has only relatively recently been introduced into Nepal which is in fact the only Hindu kingdom in the world. The caste system is particularly well established, certainly more so than that still in effect in India. The codification of the caste system in Nepal was actually set out by the Prime Minister Jang Bahadur Rana in 1854<sup>6</sup> in a legal code which comes under the name of Muluki Ain.

The new living conditions the Chepang are now subject to are extremely poor and are obviously causing changes to come about in the ethnic group. For this reason I have decided to dedicate the first part of this work to describing their situation.

The Chepang have now pronounced themselves to be Hindu, more so as to live in peace than for other reasons. This is also because they have figures of Hindu divinities in their pantheon which are, however, mainly worshipped in a totally different complex ritual to the Hindu one.

We must, however, note that, as brilliantly stated by D. B. Bista:

'In Nepal Hinduism includes Shamanism, and hence religions derived from the early Gopal and Kirat tradition, as well as Brahmanism, the version of Hinduism brought from India. When the Nepali Bureau of Statistics states that ninety per cent of the population are Hindus, people do not understand this to mean that the bulk of the population are orthodox Hindus. Nepalis have never been orthodox nor are they ever likely to be. The state automatically assumes that everyone is Hindu unless they specifically declare themselves otherwise.'<sup>7</sup>

Because of the nomadic existence and isolation which the Chepang have lived in up to fairly recently and as most of the ethnic group live in areas which are difficult to access, aspects of their culture are decisively less sincretic than those present in other ethnic groups.

We will not examine Chepang Shamanism which is rather like a complex fossil passed on from father to son down the generations at this point. It is my belief that the strong personal element typical of all forms of Shamanism, and in particular Chepang Shamanism, along with the processes of change in the environment, economy and forms of relationships with other individuals outside the ethnic group will render it more dynamic. In the chapter on the and the journeys to the Underworld and celestial worlds, we shall see how traditional means of transport such as the spirit birds, enormous fish and bamboo baskets co-exist alongside helicopters and aeroplanes not visible to the human eye, gifts given by the divinities to the *pande* so as to speed up their journeys to the cosmic worlds.

The pantheon itself is not conceived as being closed or finite and other divinities are often added. One of the most recent additions, and this appears to be of particular interest, is Tentzin Sherpa, the famous guide who led Sir Edmund Hillary on his first expedition up Mount Everest. Upon his death a few years ago, Tentzin was immediately immortalized and is considered by the Chepang to be one of the most

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economy based on agriculture has not come about in all groups at the same time. Some groups could still be said to be in the transition phase.

<sup>6</sup> See Höfer, A. 1979. *The Cast Hierarchy and the State in Nepal. A Study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*. Innsbruck.

<sup>7</sup> Bista, D. B. 1991. *Fatalism and Development, Nepal's struggle for modernisation*. Calcutta: Orient Longman Limited: p.30.

powerful high mountain gods. Many invocations and requests for help are addressed to him.

The same openness which allowed the famous Sherpa to be admitted to the pantheon had also previously led to various Hindu divinities being added to those of the ethnic group. No transformations came about in the cosmogenic concepts or beliefs and theories of the Chepang religion; the main characters round which these beliefs were centred are simply a complex entity which is open to expansion and which usually happens on impulse or as a result of external stimuli.

Another reason for my interest in this ethnic group - apart from a personal liking for them which is important in this work - was that many people in Nepal, though they belong to various different groups, believe that the *pande* or shamans are the most powerful figures in the country despite the fact that many have often never actually met a Chepang personally.

The situation in which this ethnic group finds itself at present may seem somewhat paradoxical: on the one hand the Chepang are seen by the Hindus as outcasts at best and more often as Untouchables though the *pande* are held in great esteem and even the *Chetri* and Brahmin<sup>8</sup> have recourse to them, particularly for cures for various illnesses. The Chepang themselves are aware of this power and proud of the fact that the *pande* are the only *jhakri* in the country to be in contact with all levels of the Underworld where the most important of their ethnic gods reside alongside their forefathers and most assistant spirits.

The Chepang *pande* call themselves *tunsuriban*, a word which describes their faculty to move freely in both the celestial and chthonious kingdoms. The *jhakri* of other ethnic groups, in particular the Tamangs, are called *durghsuriban* as they are only able to communicate with the celestial world and would most certainly be overcome if they were to venture into the Underworld.

The magic flight which takes place when the shaman goes into a trance is extremely important. Journeys to other cosmic worlds take place for various reasons though it is usually to find the lost or kidnapped souls of patients.

The magic flight or descent into the Underworld is one of the fundamental characteristics of Shamanism though this only one of the many aspects of the phenomena in which all the mansions or modi operandi are closely interrelated and difficult to separate into individual entities.

Shamanism is not the only religion which uses this form of travel: the bon-po priests were said to be able to fly on their drums and this was also used to indicate the ability of a mystic or Hindu saint or even Buddha<sup>9</sup> himself to free themselves into the ethereal, and these are only examples limited to the area in which this work is centred.

In Shamanism all the phases and passages in one seance are linked by functionality and cause and effect: magic flights take place to investigate future events or determine the cause of the illness of one individual or catastrophe which has overtaken a whole community. Animal sacrifices are not only used to pay homage to superior beings and to obtain favours but also have a therapeutic function: it is the shaman - *pande* in our case - who has the power to transfer the affliction of a human to an animal. The killing of this animal then has the dual function of eliminating the

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<sup>8</sup> The Nepali castal system is based on the Hindu one: at the apex of the system are the priests or Brahmins called *Bahun* in Nepali and this class is closely followed by that of the *Kshatriya* (*Chetri* in Nepali) or warriors.

<sup>9</sup> See the chapter on the magic flight.

illness while at the same time giving food to and pacifying the divinity who had induced the affliction.

Chepong Shamanism has many features which could be defined as 'classic Shamanism', amongst which is the figure of the *pande* as the spiritual leader and master of the hunt. However, this phenomena is now fairly rare as there are fewer and fewer hunter-gatherers and the hunt takes place only once a year during the one beating which is organised mainly to maintain good terms with one of the most important Chepong gods - Namrung - who is lord of the hunt and of wild animals.

From 1990 - 1995 I undertook eight field expeditions, each several months long, six of which came under the auspices of the Italian State National Centre for Research, within the framework of a research project directed by Professor Romano Mastromattei into the condition of ecstasy in the Himalayas.

The research was conducted over various areas - Makwanpur, Dhading, Chitwan - and several villages and involved more than thirty *pande*, though I developed a much closer relationship with four of these and therefore was able to develop my work much further.

The study of this ethnic group which hardly any projects have dealt with required many years of intense field work, the only information available being in the form of articles and therefore practically nothing was known about it.

The method used to carry out research is probably quite personalised. After years of study, as only on one occasion did I arrive armed with manuals and good intentions, it soon becomes clear how important it is to devise a method suited to the project in hand, to the reactions of the locals, to the fact that one makes a conscious decision to work with so called informants though I consider this term to be extremely inadequate.

If there were such a thing as 'participant observation' - though I have some reservations about this - it would be almost impossible to do this in societies based on a rigid caste system such as the Hindu one.

In the prologue to his well-known work<sup>10</sup>, G. D. Berreman, who I generally more frequently read as his field covers that of the area of the Himalayas, clearly states that anthropologists are considered to be Untouchables as they do not belong to Hindu society though they may be treated with a certain respect by the locals in so far as they are seen as rich westerners. Berreman also initially used a Brahmin as an interpreter but as he would naturally not have been able to approach members of castes below him he therefore selected another interpreter who was a Muslim.

Researchers in this type of society which is clearly divided into classes will never be accepted as one of the group and, as A. Colajanni points out, one can instigate a 'learning process' but never manage to become part of society. One of the reasons for this is that the process required for one to become part of society would involve jettisoning a role which would not be good for the research itself.<sup>11</sup>

In our case, as we see here briefly, all the Chepong are classed by the Hindu Nepalis as outcasts or Untouchables, exactly the same as the white researchers, ourselves included, even though more and more respect is being shown for the latter because of their supposedly sought after financial conditions.

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<sup>10</sup>Berreman, G. D. 1963. *Hindus of the Himalayas, Ethnography and Change*. California: New Extended Edition.

<sup>11</sup>Colajanni, A. 1980. La ri-socializzazione come processo d'ambientamento del ricercatore in una societa diversa. *L'Uomo* IV (2). Rome. The whole volume is one of the best collections of contributions made by researchers, mainly Italian, on the subject of field research.

In fact, when the Muluki Ain legal code was introduced in 1854, the Chepang were assigned to the caste of the so-called , together with other groups like the Bhote, Kumal, Hayu and Tharu. At that time slavery was legal and therefore the people belonging to this caste found themselves in an unfortunate situation. However, it must be pointed out that this was, from the point of view of the hierarchy, the last of the so-called classes, from which it was still acceptable to receive food or drink, the last two castes being the classes, the first of which (which Europeans would also belong to) was while the second was considered to be .

The 1935 version of the Muluki Ain saw no changes in castes though slavery was abolished.

In spite of the so-called of the Chepang it must be pointed out that their conditions of extreme poverty has led them to be classed as Untouchables and therefore sent down to the last step of the caste system.

For their part, the Chepang do not recognise this system and despite their initial reticence are open and hospitable people. On the expeditions I used a Buddhist Sherpa guide - Jitman - partly because he was so courteous, humane and intelligent and also because it would not have been possible to use a guide who belonged to a caste superior to that of the Chepang. This would have been a mistake as the *pande* would not have accepted to talk about their private matters with Brahmins or *Chetris* who they are extremely wary of, justifiedly so, and they themselves would have been strained, fearing possible contamination. I have therefore always used bearers who were Buddhist if possible or of the same caste as the Chepang.

The consequences of errors on the part of the researcher in this sense are much graver than one might think. On my last expedition - which took place from March 1995 to June 1995 - I was working in a Chepang village in the district of Makwanpur which was fairly near one inhabited by *Chetri*. When the *Chetri* heard of my arrival in the village, they were jealous of the fact that a could be interested in a culture which was considered to be inferior to theirs, and began to arrive at the Chepang village every day. This caused much disturbance, most of all to the interviews and talks which usually take place in the open and can be attended by everyone. The *pande* were subdued and annoyed by the intrusion and provided false information so as to distract the *Chetri* who were most denigrating. The situation had become unbearable and ended in my having to dedicate some of my time to the *Chetri*. I therefore asked one of them to recite stories and sacred chants in an attempt to put an end to the jealousy that I myself had caused which could, in time, have been the cause of real hostility between villages. This attempt was successful and once the *Chetri* were satisfied that they too had been the object of research, they lost interest in my activities and did not return to the Chepang village except on routine visits.

In the course of my work with the Chepang communities, I have often used the method of repetition of field research as suggested by R.H. Lowie in 1940<sup>12</sup>. The same questionnaires have been given to different shamans so as to be better able to determine the constants within the shaman framework which is in itself very personalised. Each *pande* has their own divinities and assistant spirits which are often unknown to others, and all the main steps to becoming a *pande*, from the calling to the profession by the spirits to the learning of therapeutic techniques and the secrets of initiation, to the making of the drum, take place during dreams which are thought to have been sent by various deities, apparently without there being any form of human intervention.

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<sup>12</sup>Lowie, R. H. 1940. Native languages as Ethnographical Tools. *American Anthropologist* 42.

The transcription used for Nepali words is based on that suggested by Ralph L. Turner in , London, 1931 (reprinted 1965). Words from other languages, most of which come from spoken language like that of the Chepang, have been left as they were found in their original contexts. The Chepang terms have been transcribed according to the phonetic transcription suggested by R. L. Turner. The Nepali terms have been used alongside the reference to the page and column, a or b, where definitions are to be found in the dictionary (example: *jhakri* - T231b).

To conclude this brief introduction, I would like to thank my husband Dimitri who has patiently and tenaciously accompanied me and supported me over the past few years; Jitman Sherpa, our guide and all the *pande* who have so generously and patiently offered their precious information, in particular Narcing Praja, who allowed me, after years of fruitless attempts, to attend the important ceremony held in honour of the god of hunting, Namrung. I should also like to thank Tulo Kancha, who has generously and sagely passed on extremely important information; and lastly, Hare Bahadur Praja and his wife Krishora Devi who has been my main guide and informant over the past six years. I should like to express my profound gratitude to all these people and many others who have helped me, in trust and with great humanity. To those who have passed away, I would like to pay my respects and express my gratitude, they will always be in my thoughts.

## **Brief introduction to the geographical and historical background of the Chepang.**

The Chepang are one of the least known and least studied groups in Nepal. At present they reside in the southern central belt of the country, in the districts of Dhading, Makwanpur, Chitwan and in the southern part of the Gorkha district. Most of the villages are located on the slopes of the Mahabharat chain of mountains at anything from 1000 to 2400 metres though it is also possible to find other agglomerates at lower altitudes.

The present geographical distribution is the result of a series of migrations which over the past fifty years have caused the Chepang to move from the lands originally inhabited by their forefathers which were located mainly in the district of Dhading in search of arable land. Up to a few decades ago, these people were hunters and gatherers and lived a nomadic life in the jungles of the southern central belt of the country. Violent deforestation which is still ongoing and most of all a ban on hunting which applies to most of the country, have brought on violent changes in the living habits of the Chepang. They have since been forced to lead a more sedentary life and change to a different type of economy, from one based on hunting and gathering to one based on a simple form of agriculture.

This all happened when most of the other ethnic groups in Nepal had already been sedenterised for a long time. While the Chepang were still living a nomadic life, other groups, amongst which those belonging to the Hindu system of castes, the Brahmin and *Chetri* and ethnic groups like the Magar, Gurung and many others, had already occupied the best land in the country.

Nepal, as we know, enjoys an unusual geographical location, which has been and still is its fortune, as it is this very factor which has contributed to the independence of this tiny country which is located between two superpowers, China and India. The lack of roads, the almost impassable high mountains and the paths which are almost impossible to use during the monsoons have all reduced the risks of invasion at different times in history. The same factors, along with a lack of demand for the few Nepalese products which do exist, have meant that Nepal has never been colonised. All this has allowed the around fifty different ethnic groups which co-exist quite peacefully<sup>13</sup> here to survive and be fairly independent.

On the other hand the orographical situation of Nepal means that there is not much arable land. Most agriculture takes place on the Terai plain, in the district of Chitwan, and this is in no way sufficient to meet national requirements. This means that Nepal is one of the poorest countries in the world and it has one of the highest child mortality rates on the planet.

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<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, this peaceful co-existence is doomed to cease to exist in a few years time. Over the past few years, following a bloody uprising (April 1990), the King has been forced to introduce a multi-party system. Some parties have had the support of India which is interested in moving into the country. The parties influenced by India send their representatives into the remotest of villages so as to spread propaganda. Many of the discussions initiated by the orators are aimed at sowing the seeds of dissent and promoting ethnic conflict between the different groups in the hope of further weakening the country thus allowing India to intervene on the pretext of putting an end to such problems. It is no coincidence that the area in which these activities are most intense is the southernmost and richest part of Nepal which is located on its border with India and linked to the most important road in the country along which many ethnic groups are located. These groups have lived in harmony for many years and it is only now that tensions between them have begun to arise which, according to the daily newspapers in Nepal, have some certain import.

As we have already mentioned, the Chepang, who were one of the last groups to be sedenterised and be converted to agriculture, found the best land already occupied by others and were assigned land which was both arid and stony. No educational campaign was ever carried out to teach the techniques of agriculture to these populations which were traditionally linked to hunting activities and predominantly from jungle and forest environments.

Most of the agricultural equipment used by the Chepang is wooden or at most partly made of iron as this group has never worked metals before and would have to turn to the Kami, the blacksmiths, for help. This in turn would imply other expenses which the majority of the population would not be in a position to meet. The sharp gradient of the land also means that the use of animals for ploughing is prohibitive and therefore everything must be carried out manually with the result that the Chepang are only able to provide for their alimentary needs for six months of the year at best. This makes them one of the poorest groups in Nepal, with a pro capita income of two hundred and sixty rupees a year, or around five and a half dollars, in contrast with an average pro-capita <sup>14</sup>expenditure of around two hundred and ninety rupees per year.

In order to settle debts incurred during periods of famine lodged with Brahmins and *Chetris* in particular, the Chepang are forced to work the land for the latter for long periods at a time. Their own land is then left unattended or under the supervision of women and children which results in even poorer harvests the following year.

The situation has been further aggravated by other factors. Up to a few decades ago, the Chepang, who had been nomadic forest dwellers with no or very little contact with other ethnic groups, were completely outwith the Hindu caste system which had a fairly strong and dynamic hold on the country, and were predominantly shaman in religion, suddenly found themselves included in the caste system, which assigned them to the lowest ranks of its hierarchy because of their economic conditions and the fact that they ate pork.

As we have already said, although the Chepang are classed as simple outcasts by many in Nepal, an extremely unfortunate position to be in, many others class them as Untouchables. This term is used to denote a whole series of groups who carry out unsavoury and degrading tasks often considered impure which are avoided by all the other castes and they themselves are often seen as being on the same levels as animals or worse.

As indicated by Corneille Jest, there are only a few groups which would accept food or water, which would be considered impure, from the hands of the Chepang:

‘...Within the social structure of Nepal, the Chepang are on the same level as the Tamang and the Gurung. The latter two groups consider the Chepang to be an inferior caste, similar to the Kami or Sarki. In fact, the Tamang and Gurung may not accept food from the Chepang and the Chepang may not enter a Tamang or Gurung house. They also raise pigs which is a distinctive feature of the lower Nepalese castes. The *Bhaun* and *Chetri* call the Chepang *puhun* or Untouchables and treat them as such.’<sup>15</sup>

As we have already said, the Chepang cannot be said to be rigidly Hindu, although many of them profess to be so. However, despite the fact that some of the original

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<sup>14</sup> Figures from Ghimire, K. C. 1993. *The Chepang/Praja group and the Praja Development Programme*, Hetauda, and reports from the Praja Development Programme which will be discussed in detail at a later point.

<sup>15</sup>Jest, C. 1966. Les Chepang, ethnie népalaise de langue tibéto-bimane. *Objet et Mondes* VI (2). Paris: p.178 (My translation).

tribal divinities have taken on the names of Hindu divinities, they generally maintain their own features and prerogatives.

Nepal is the only Hindu kingdom in the world where Hinduism is the state religion and the King, himself a Hindu, is seen as a reincarnation of the god Visnu.

In spite of this, there is great religious tolerance because of the fact that so many different ethnic groups and languages have co-existed for so long. Hinduism, Buddhism, a Muslim minority and other local religions which are mostly shamanic and practised by many ethnic groups still co-exist quite peacefully and in many places are interlinked.

The fact that the Chepang came to be part of the social tissue of the country so late and the fact that they have many problems, most of which stem from the quality of land assigned to them has resulted in a certain lack of tolerance on the part of the dominant classes. The latter are intolerant of the fact that the Chepang can maintain a certain cultural and religious autonomy, though this has latterly been undermined by the advent of Catholic and Protestant missionaries.

Before the advent of democracy (1990) any proselytism or conversion to Christianity was firmly prohibited. However, recently the situation has changed and a remarkable number of missionaries are now entering the country freely and directing their activities at poorer minority groups in an attempt to effect mass conversions in exchange for gifts of foodstuffs and promises of a better life.

The Chepang are in a difficult position in relation to other groups or Hindu castes. For example, it is well known that - despite the ban on hunting - many Nepalese still continue to hunt, though these activities are limited to groups which are numerically and economically better off than the Chepang.

The government has attempted to integrate this group into the socio-economic tissue of the country through special programmes. The most important of these is the Praja Development Programme, which, unfortunately, because of the extreme disorganisation and rampant corruption existing in the country, has not had the desired positive results. At times it has actually contributed to the dramatic and extreme worsening of the conditions of isolation in which the Chepang live with respect to other ethnic groups and Hindu castes.

After centuries, the name of this group was changed: its original title, Chepang or Chebang was changed to Praja which means subjects and is actually also used to describe other ethnic minorities living in the southern central belt of the country. The original term Chepang is now taken to be degrading and offensive and is generally used as an insult which can be applied to persons belonging to other ethnic groups as well.

In spite of this, for the moment, many Chepang still refuse to accept the new name and retain their own religious and cultural identity.

### **The Praja Development Programme**

This development and aid programme was initiated in 1977, following a visit by the King to the south of the country when he came into contact with the Chepang. In the same year, the King's sister called up a fairly large group of officials, ministers, social workers and technicians of various types with the aim of setting up and running the programme. However, although it had already been allocated funding this did not get off the ground for several years.

The name of this ethnic group was changed in 1977 on the orders of the King who ordered all the Nepalese to address the Chepang with the name Praja. In the royal

decree he stipulated that the name was being changed on earnest request of the Chepang themselves who had supposedly begged the King to call them subjects or Praja.

It is almost impossible to calculate the size of this ethnic group. There is no Registry Office in Nepal and the geographical complexity of the country means that many people live in conditions of extreme isolation.

The unreliability of Nepalese statistics can be confirmed by the fact that an estimate made in 1977 put the number of Chepang at nine thousand<sup>16</sup> while in 1991 the State Department of Statistics put the number of Chepang at twenty six thousand.

Latterly a triannual budget for aid and interventions has been introduced and allocated funding to the tune of twenty two million, seven hundred thousand rupees. However, rampant corruption in the country and a certain disinterest in the weaker groups has meant that almost none of this funding has been used for real development projects.

In the Praja Development Programme reports one can read about aid operations which only exist in theory and have never actually been put into practise. The programme is divided into various sections, amongst which: education, agriculture and the improvement of economical conditions; housing and land acquisition; craftsmanship and improved earnings; improving the potability of water; health; means of transport and social integration.

In the section on education, the Programme confirms the existence of primary schools and even secondary schools which are supposed to have increased literacy to twenty-five to thirty percent. It is true that makeshift buildings have been constructed which are used as schools in some, and only some, of the more remoter villages, but the report omits to mention that no teachers have been provided for the schools, nor does it mention that, in the best of cases, some haggard looking educators have appeared in villages and have demanded payment of the pupils only to remain in their posts for a month at most. Many of the schools built are already in a state of complete ruin and are used for shelter by animals and travellers. In the villages nearest the asphalt road, around twenty to thirty percent of the children manage at least to attend the first years of primary school, but as soon as one walks a few hours further on it is impossible to find anyone who can read or write.

According to the statistics presented in the section on agriculture, only two percent of the Chepang population have enough provisions to survive the year, the remaining ninety-eight percent managing to survive on their meagre harvests for six months only.

The Chepang use the slash and burn method or *khoriya* (T130b) which is disapproved of by the authorities who accuse the Chepang of destroying forests and causing fires.

In 1995 an article appeared on this subject in one of the most popular daily newspapers denouncing the complete failure of the Praja Development Programme. At the same time it pointed out that the *khoriya* system should be stopped, and this may well be a prelude to government intervention.<sup>17</sup>

The main crops include maize, soya, lentils, grain, rice and some varieties of tubers that are related to the potato which are cultivated at lower altitudes. At higher altitudes where the *khoriya* system is most often used, millet, maize, a certain quality

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<sup>16</sup> Bista, D.B. 1987. *People of Nepal*, Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar: p.99.

<sup>17</sup> The *khoriya* system among the Chepang ethnic group. 9 Baisakh 2052 (or 22 April 1995 according to our calendar): *Gorkha Patra*. Kathmandu.

of rice which grows in dry conditions, and mustard are grown. There are some fruit trees in the villages but, given the meagre harvest, fruit is almost non-existent in the Chepang diet. Animals are reared, mainly chickens, goats and, in richer families, pigs, buffalos and cows.

During the dry season, which is the worst season because of the famine and epidemics which occur throughout the country, a Chepang family may end up eating only once a week: this day has been given a special term in Chepang, the *dawan*.

During these periods the Chepang survive on wild fruits, roots and mushrooms which they manage to find in the jungle. Many of these vegetables are poisonous, some deathly, and must be treated for long periods of time before they can be consumed with any safety. The gradual disappearance of the forests has made the search for edible products more difficult and the women, who are responsible for gathering them, must undertake long and difficult journeys to find food.

Within the Praja Development Programme, there is a sort of sub-project called the Technical Development Programme which aims to develop and widen the Chepang's knowledge about the cultivation of fruit and vegetables, apiculture, irrigation and rearing techniques. Actually, very little of this has been put into practise: no real campaigns to inform the population have been promoted. The only initiative taken, which has never been repeated, is that of the distribution of sacks of seeds in some villages. However, as this took place during a terrible famine and these initiatives were not accompanied by specialist and technical courses advising how to best use these, the seeds (which were mainly maize) were eaten and not planted. This is quite understandable given the terrible conditions in which the inhabitants of those villages were living at the time which were also exacerbated by the fact that the Chepang tend to live for the present and not plan for the future.

The behaviour and psychology of this people, despite the fact that they have been sedentarised for many years, are in fact still linked to their life in the jungle. In some cases, the miserable conditions they live in also derive from the fact that, for the moment, it is inconceivable for a Chepang to go out and work, for example, in one of the few factories in the country. Daily needs are met in an attempt to keep the family nucleus intact which would be impossible if some of these members were to move to the capital or other cities in search of employment.

Their attitude to stable habitations also reflects the Chepang's attachment to the world of the forest. All the dwellings are in fact huts made from branches and small pieces of dry wood or bamboo which are not joined together by earth or any other material. Even in mixed villages or agglomerates where several ethnic groups live together, as is the case along the big asphalt road which leads to the borders with India, while almost all the dwellings are constructed from earth or stone or wooden beams cemented together with mud, the Chepang houses are immediately recognisable in that they are only temporary structures which are destroyed in the monsoons by the terrible rains. When this happens in the mountain villages which are rarely of mixed groups, the Chepang take refuge in caves or sleep out under the shelter of rocks and this has given a false picture of them for years.

In fact, several years ago, before anyone had heard of the Chepang, some Nepalese journalists discovered a group of them living in caves because of the monsoon. As a result, a couple of sensationalist articles were published in which mention was made of a group of people whose culture had remained unchanged since the time of the Stone Age. There was a certain interest in the Chepang after this but at the same time they were also depicted as savages and primitive people and this belief, which many

unfounded stories totally devoid of any scientific basis were based on, is still held today.

In some parts of Nepal, even in the capital, there are people who believe the Chepang are dangerous savages. It is no coincidence that the Chepang shamans are considered to be the most powerful (and are sometimes the most feared) in the country and many people believe the Chepang live in close contact with the divinities and both benign and malign spirits. There are still stories of human sacrifices which are supposed to have been carried out to gain the favour of assistant spirits: many of these stories are told to frighten children but are firmly believed by adults too. There is no evidence of any human sacrifice ever having taken place at any time and I personally believe, after years of studying and working with this ethnic group, that it is highly improbable that any of these events have ever taken place, and the stories of human sacrifices are only some of the stories, not the least incredible<sup>18</sup>, which have been recounted.

To return to the matter of housing, it must be said that habitations are to be found at quite some distance from one another. Chepang village confines are somewhat vague and houses can be several hours walk away from one another. Villages and single habitations are usually not located near water for fear of inhabitants contracting malaria which up to not long ago, and perhaps even now, though there are contrasting medical<sup>19</sup> opinions on the matter, was fairly common in the south of the country.

As we have already said, Chepang housing is extremely simple and resembles more of a hut than a house. Many of these have a space outside which could be termed a veranda. The inside of the dwelling consists of an area with no windows in which a hole has been dug in one of the corners, usually that opposite the entrance, which is used as a fireplace.

In the cold season all family members sleep round the fire. The earthen floor is first warmed up by spreading ashes. During the hot season, most Chepang still prefer to sleep inside the huts which offer some protection against wild animals.

In its chapter on the Praja Development Programme proposes that the Chepang should no longer sleep in caves. This section of the projects is called the and would include the provision of housing, as well as land and construction materials to particularly needy Chepang families. In fact, the little land which has been assigned to them is completely useless, either because of its gradient or because the earth is too rocky.

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<sup>18</sup> Over the past few years, the collective imagination of the Nepalese is moving to another ethnic group about which even less is known and which has been studied even less than the Chepang. This group is known as the Raute, the last group of nomadic hunters in Nepal, or perhaps even in this part of Asia. Recently at least three articles have been published in important daily newspapers on this matter. In one of these (Sawad, K. B. 6 Jeth 2052 or 20 May 1995. Story and Grief of the Tribal Raute. *Gorkha Patra*. Kathmandu.) The author confirms, though of course no evidence is given for this and this article was obviously based on popular hearsay, that the Raute still make human sacrifices to gain the favour of their ancestors. This article actually describes the manner in which the sacrifice is purported to be carried out, supposedly by perforating the cranium with a long steel wire so as to allow the blood to spurt out as far as possible and reach their ancestors. These tales are of no help whatsoever to minority populations which are already regarded with some suspicion by the authorities and other groups. In the case of the *Raute*, it is curious that these tales mysteriously appeared immediately after the headman of the group blankly refused the sedenterisation of the group which in fact constitutes an act of disobedience of royal orders.

<sup>19</sup> We have personally been able to verify that many of the western and Nepalese doctors in Kathmandu believe that malaria still exists in the south of the country though Terai doctors and those in the district of Chitwan state that it has been eradicated for years. During my missions, I have never met anyone suffering from the illness.

I have seen Chepang living in houses, mainly stone, which have been purpose built for them in some villages in the district of Dhading. Curiously enough though, these houses, which look the richest, are in the poorest of villages.

According to the accounts of older people, when it was discovered that some of the Chepang were resisting persistent requests to settle down in one area and put an end to their nomadic lifestyle, coercive action was attempted and after its complete failure, subtler action was taken.

Houses which were of a fairly high standard in comparison to other housing in villages were built and used to convince the Chepang to transfer entire families to their destined areas. However, in most cases, these habitations were in areas where the land was not arable, very far from water with no sign of irrigation systems and extremely far away from other inhabited areas or schools and health centres. As a result of this, the Chepang who had moved into these areas were soon afflicted by famine and epidemics in the space of only a few months. Many families abandoned these areas and attempted to move to the south, to the Terai plain, but most of them, particularly the older members, remained in these villages.

On the other hand, yet another problem arose and still remains with regard to the construction of a new house.

As we shall see, the whole life of the Chepang revolves round the presence of the shaman who is the key figure in the community. The construction of a new house, which is an important event in the Chepang villages, revolves round the divinations and decisions taken by the shaman in question. The choice of site and building materials to be used is made by the shaman alone and no Chepang would be at ease and may even refuse to live in a house or place which has not been subjected to some form of religious rite.

Before the construction of a new house, the *pande* must hold certain ceremonies, mainly divinatory in nature, to ascertain that the site chosen is not under the influence of invisible malign spirits who might be residing there. He must also ascertain that the family's dead are pacified and serene and ensure that they do not disturb their relations who have decided to move to a particular site. It is also necessary to verify that there are no earthly divinities residing in nearby stones, running water or trees as they could cause serious problems, such as illnesses, epidemics and various other types of misfortune which could befall the inhabitants of the house who could happen to be in their territory.

Once the shaman has dealt with all these possibilities, he indicates the best site for the construction and advises on it. Even after this lengthy procedure has come to an end things may still go wrong and the Chepang, who are not attached in any way to their habitations, will abandon their house and build another shelter. In the words of Nivak. K. Rai:

'...Apart from a desire to avoid landslides and natural pits, a housesite is chosen by a Chepang shaman, who analyzes the soil and advises on construction. Housesites are abandoned if the evil souls of the dead give trouble, or if many family members die in an epidemic. Some houses are left temporarily when a family member has a bad dream and misfortune is expected. Houses are also abandoned if the stone of the walls or the wood of the floor constantly makes noises, for the materials are believed to have been brought from a graveyard area.'<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rai, N. K. 1985. *People of the stones*. Kathmandu: Tribhuvan University: p.22.

It would seem to be quite clear from this that any project aiming to build houses and villages for the Chepang is doomed to fail unless it works alongside the shamans who function as guides and spokesmen for the community.

All the projects designed to deal with sanitary conditions which are to be found in the chapter on in the Praja Development Programme have so far had very few results. This is both because no serious initiatives to construct centres promoting medical assistance and giving information about matters of health have been approved and also because the programme openly disapproves of the figure of the shaman and condemns those who turn to them for assistance, accusing them of ignorance and simplemindedness.

Sanitary conditions in Nepal are somewhat desperate, mainly because there has been no coordinated campaigns for educating and informing the public about these matters. Projects set up by foreigners may have had some effect but Nepalese projects have had almost none.

What makes the situation even more difficult is the Hindu caste system: Nepalese doctors, who have in the main graduated from Indian universities, belong to the highest castes of the Hindu hierarchical system. Any contact with persons belonging to a lower caste or with Untouchables and outcasts like the Chepang and many other groups would mean contamination<sup>21</sup>. For this reason, many of the Nepalese doctors in hospitals refuse to visit patients who are Untouchables and even when they agree to do so, the visit is carried out so summarily that there is no physical contact and it is based on verbal exchange of information<sup>22</sup>.

There is then the almost insurmountable obstacle of medicines which are extremely expensive in Nepal where there is no form of medical assistance and therefore these are inaccessible to the greater part of the population. In order to buy ten antibiotic capsules, a Chepang would have to work for an entire year.

In the Praja Development Programme, three percent of the budget has been allocated to a five year programme designed to help improve conditions in the field of health, though hardly any results have been obtained<sup>23</sup>. Without asking why such a small figure has been allocated in the budget to a matter which is supposed to be one of its main aims or asking where this three percent has been spent, the fact is that none of the Chepang villages and especially the remoter ones have any sanitary or medical facilities.

The shaman is responsible for the mental and physical health of the community and his cures are the only ones recognised as valid by the inhabitants of the village. Any project concerning matters of health should therefore work alongside the shamans without condemning them outright and thus incurring the hostility and diffidence of village inhabitants.

During the early eighties, a project for education about sanitary matters was set up to deal with the matter of family planning. This was organised by particularly well-known Nepalese of a certain standing with the assistance of foreigners and attempted to make the shamans the spokesmen for this campaign. As far as we know, this project was never repeated and did not actually cover areas inhabited by the Chepang

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<sup>21</sup> In theory, the doctor is the only person who - according to caste regulation - is not subject to contamination, but many Nepalese doctors still feel this danger exists.

<sup>22</sup> I have often accompanied particularly ill Chepang who had already attempted in vain to find help at other medical institutions to hospital and they were not even visited by a doctor so I have therefore had occasion to witness this behaviour at first hand.

<sup>23</sup> Ghimire, K. C. 1993. *The Chepang - Praja group and the Praja Development Programme*. Hetauda.

though it was successful and gave people some idea of issues such as birth control, a topic which had scarcely been touched on in the past<sup>24</sup>.

Closely linked to this matter is the chapter on in the Programme. The problem of drinking water is definitely one of the most serious in the countryside where much running water, even at high altitudes, is contaminated because of villages. The Programme declares that it has provided for the safeguarding of the sources and has noted the construction of eleven water reserves in the district of Makwanpur, but as far as I know, none of the Chepang I consulted were aware of these initiatives. However, before safeguarding sources of drinking water there should have been a campaign highlighting the importance of the use of pure water. Most of the endemic illnesses in the country stem from the consumption of contaminated water but villagers and often even city-dwellers do not realise that these illnesses are linked to the consumption of water which is not potable.

On the subject of , the same annual report of the Praja Development Programme declares that almost all the initiatives have failed for a series of reasons. This is mainly due to the fact that there is no form of Chepang craftsmanship, except for the making of baskets and reed matting which is generally destined for use in the home or in the family.

In fact, the Nepalese project has attempted to use the Chepang in the manufacture of carpets, clothes and materials which can be found quite easily in the areas most frequented by foreigners in Kathmandu and are sold at very high prices (for Nepalese standards) to tourists. In this type of work, people who have no form of assistance are required to work between fourteen and sixteen hours a day, sometimes even eighteen. They are expected to work in dark and airless rooms for a ridiculous salary which, in the case of women and children who are greatly sought after, could be in the form of one meagre meal per day. Work in the carpet industry is particularly insanitary and badly paid in that the work is done in narrow spaces and the down produced by work on the carpets causes serious lung diseases, especially in children<sup>25</sup>.

As the Chepang are aware of this situation, it is quite logical that very few Chepang are inclined to leave their villages and families to move to the capital with these rather disappointing prospectives.

The last two sections of the Programme deal with the matters of transport and social integration. Twenty one percent of the budget has been allocated to the construction of roads and paths, which comes under the supervision of the District Development Corporation but nothing concrete is mentioned. The Chepang area, like many other areas in the country, has no roads or pathways of any sort; only dangerous steep paths which are continually being destroyed or cut off by the monsoons and frequent avalanches brought on by deforestation. This means that many villages are completely isolated for many months a year. Some of the remoter areas inhabited by the Chepang are many days walk from centres of any importance and the complete isolation of these small communities, which may at times consist of simple family nuclei, is quite common. It is not uncommon to find entire villages where people have never come into contact with anyone from the villages in the surrounding areas, never mind a westerner.

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<sup>24</sup> This interesting project is reported in: Shrestha, R. M. and Lediard, M. 1980. *Faith Healers: A Force for Change*. Kathmandu: Project supported by UNFPA NEEP/77/PO3 and published with the assistance of UNICEF.

<sup>25</sup> One of the periodicals which deals with the abuse of children in the workplace in Nepal is published in Kathmandu. It is published every three months and is directed by the CWIN (Children Workers in Nepal).

Probably the fact that the Chepang live in areas which are difficult to reach has contributed to the fact that very little study has been carried out on this ethnic group.

The section on social integration emphasises that the Chepang are somewhat uneasy about maintaining closer contact with other ethnic groups. This only comes about very rarely on the instigation of others, like, for example, during the construction of the Mahendra Highway, the most important asphalt road which links Nepal and India. Many of the poorest families in the country from different ethnic backgrounds, many of which were naturally Chepang, were employed on this project for the backbreaking task of breaking up stones. On these occasions it is obvious that people from different ethnic backgrounds live together with rhythms and habits completely different to those of the village.

According to the Programme, actual tours of the country take place which should allow members of the Chepang communities to meet other groups and even foreigners.

This seems somewhat improbable for those who have lived and worked for some time in various villages and areas under the control of the Programme. None of the abovementioned initiatives has ever and will probably ever take place, and there are, in fact, many other, more important operations to carry out in different sectors.

Social integration should also imply involvement in politics. In fact, since political parties have been made legal, they are all trying to gain the consent of the weakest and most ignorant with demagogical campaigns, actually deceiving the population which is certainly unaware of the presumed or real importance of political developments and which is mostly illiterate.

The Programme affirms conscious and responsible participation in politics by the Chepang, which is fairly improbable given the evidence collected by Eva Kipp, some of which was from a woman called June Maya Praja:

'In the election time people visit our house and make speeches. The men from the village tell us what we have to do. They told us that there were different boxes with different drawings <sup>26</sup>; a sun and a tree and we had to put the paper in the box with the tree. The old people didn't understand that and they threw their papers away.'<sup>27</sup>

This analysis of the Praja Development Programme has been made so as to give a better picture of the actual conditions the Chepang live in.

The development project does not mention any religious or cultural change within the group, although there is a certain tendency on the part of higher castes to consider the Chepang culture as inferior and imperfect with respect to that of the dominating ones.

Another serious problem which threatens the Chepang culture has presented itself in the form of the proselytism carried out by missionaries, most of whom Catholic.

A good number of missionaries have approached the shamans in the poorest Chepang villages and asked them to give up their religion in exchange for gifts of food and medicine. Deceit is frequently used to convince the people that Christianity is the only valid religion. Shamans are often forced by missionaries to sell their equipment, particularly the drum, in order to make money.

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<sup>26</sup> Given the high percentage of illiteracy, political parties have used very simple signs, such as that of the tree, which is the symbol of the party closest to the King. The voters must pick out the urn with the desired symbol and insert a pre-stamped voting paper.

<sup>27</sup> Kipp, E. 1994. *A bundle of Worries - Aspects of life in the Praja Village Chhervang, placed in a gender perspective*. Kathmandu.

No ceremony can take place without the shaman's paraphernalia, particularly the drum and the shaman is no longer such without his drum and cannot be of any use to the community. This creates great unease in the village population and is a cause of much tension in the shamans themselves who often fall into depression or end up as alcoholics.

During research completed in 1994 in various villages in the districts of Dhading and Makwanpur, I happened upon a village about two days walk away from the main road where the oldest *pande*, Chandra Bahadur and later on his family, had been converted to Christianity. On being asked what had prompted this conversion Chandra Bahadur replied that this new religion did not require animal sacrifices or offerings of food which were costly and then recounted that:

'One day a man came who told me that if I were to accept Christianity, everything would be all right and that it was not necessary to carry out *puja*<sup>28</sup> or sacrifice chickens....everything was much simpler. The man also told me to get rid of the drum: I gave it to my brother and have no idea what he has done with it.....he may have sold it. This man subjected me to a test and then I changed my religion and so may now forget my forefathers.'

Chandra Bahadur appeared depressed and afraid during the interview and only revealed his preoccupation a little before my departure: that as he was now very old he did not know what would happen to his soul after death. The missionary had told him about paradise and the joy of the final reunion with God, but Chandra Bahadur was still afraid that in spite of all this the traditional place in the Underworld where worthy Chepang would go to live eternally together with their divinities would still exist. In this case, his soul having chosen the new religion, he would be on his own in this where no-one would understand the Chepang language.

Unfortunately the first signs of tension between groups of Chepang who have been converted and those who have not are beginning to show. An example of this is seen in an account by Ganesh Man Gurung:

'The conflict for and against Christianity has emerged between the *pandes* and the local converted people. Since the introduction of Christianity in the area, the number of *pandes*' clients has been decreasing, which means that the main source of income has been cut off. In 1993, many Chepang shamans, with the help of a few outsiders, nearly 40 people, attacked the Christian Chepangs of Jirkidanda of Raksirang VDC and looted many houses. The villagers fled and hid in the forest for three days. So, mainly a few of the Chepang *pandes* have been found against Christianity while the others sold or abandoned their drums in disinterest. It was heard that those who follow Christianity have been paid Rs.100 - 2500. But this allegation has not been confirmed...'<sup>29</sup>

Luckily these are still only isolated incidents and the Chepang, like other ethnic minorities, have begun to realise the importance of the uniqueness of their culture and the importance of preserving it and passing it on to the young. I have heard of many cases in which missionaries' attempts have failed because of resistance put up by the shamans themselves who have not trusted the flattery and strategies used.

In those few cases where attempts at conversion have succeeded, the situation is extremely dramatic: tensions born of contact with outside pressures, constant poverty, famine and epidemics are all balanced out in Chepang religion which is embedded in every action of the day, however small or insignificant. The culture, which is passed

<sup>28</sup> In the Hindu and Nepali languages, this word is used to describe any type of rite or religious ceremony, not necessarily only shamanic ones. (T384b)

<sup>29</sup> Gurung, G. M. 1995. *Report from a Chepang Village*. Kathmandu: published by Gurung, S.: p.47.

on orally, is passed down from generation to generation and constantly reenacted by the previous generations in shamanic chants, the Chepang and Nepali chants which are used in the fairly frequent ceremonies.

These are old myths which tell of the nobility and antiquity of the Chepang, the divinities and spirits, of their forefathers, of life and death. To destroy all this by not allowing shamanic seances, which are perhaps the only time when the Chepang are reunited and can take courage from this sense of togetherness, to take place is equivalent to destroying the culture of a people who would collapse under the weight of internal and external pressures.

Chepang Shamanism provides explanations and reassurance for the individual: the shaman has been much talked about as fulfilling the role of psychotherapist within the community and in fact, in the case of the Chepang, without wanting to impose terms which have been somewhat inflated by the psychiatric or psychoanalytic terms of other cultures, one cannot help but note the shaman's role in maintaining the equilibrium within the community and within the individual.

### **Studies carried out on the Chepang**

Studies carried out on the Chepang culture and ethnic group are few and far between. The first to have studied the Chepang was Brian Houghton Hodgson (1800 - 1894), a courageous and erudite British diplomat who held important diplomatic posts first in India and then in Nepal from 1918 onwards and was the official British Resident at the court of India and then at the court of Nepal.

Apart from for his undisputed diplomatic qualities, Hodgson is also noted for his brilliant and passionate studies of many Indian and Nepalese ethnic groups and for his work on the ancient religions and cultures of these countries and of Tibet. He was also known for his extremely important collection of archaeological objects, ancient Tibetan pictures and tribal products which is now to be found in many of the most famous European museums.

Hodgson's work reveals a deep interest in the linguistics and philology of the different languages spoken by minority ethnic groups in Nepal. Over the years the diplomat compiled many dictionaries on different ethnic groups which are still of great help to anyone interested in studying spoken cultures.

Amongst other things, Hodgson also worked on a short dictionary of Chepang terms and a comparative dictionary of the languages of the of Nepal<sup>30</sup>. The definition was intended by Hodgson to mean all those tribes which had become smaller and smaller in comparison to other groups, mainly hunters-gatherers and probably aboriginal.

The first time the Chepang appeared in his writings was in 1847 in an article on the aboriginal tribes of the Himalayan area where he made a brief reference to <sup>31</sup>. But for the moment this remained only a mention, given the scarcity of information and difficulties encountered by Hodgson in meeting the Chepang and Kusunda personally. This was only to come about a few years later and this interesting information was to be reported in the article quoted which was published in 1857<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>30</sup> Hodgson, B. H. 1857. Comparative Vocabulary of the Languages of the Broken Tribes of Nepal. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 5. Calcutta: pp.318 - 349. This short dictionary of Chepang comes at the end of the article - On the Chepang and Kusunda Tribes of Nepal. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* XVII. Calcutta: pp.49 - 54.

<sup>31</sup> Hodgson, B. H. 1847. On the Aborigines of the sub-Himalayas. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* XVI. Calcutta: p1236.

<sup>32</sup> Hodgson, B. H. 1857, op.cit., pp.45-54.

This is an extremely important text which describes the Chepang in ethnological terms:

‘Amid the dense forest of the central region of Nepal, to the westward of the great valley, dwell in scanty numbers and nearly in a state of nature, two broken tribes having no apparent affinity with the civilized races of that country, and seeming like the fragments of an earlier population...

...They have bows and arrows, of which the iron arrow-heads are procured from their neighbours, but almost no other implement of civilisation, and it is in the very skilful snaring of the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air that all their little intelligence is manifested.’<sup>33</sup>

The article goes on to describe types of dwellings, which were temporary and constructed using the leafy branches of trees. He also notes some of their physical characteristics and states that he was surprised to note that the Chepang did not resemble any other ethnic group in the area. Their stature was much smaller than average, they were much darker, and their facial features, according to Hodgson, led him to conclude that this group of hunter-gatherers, like the Kusunda and Hayu, were aboriginal groups, fragments of a group that had originally dwelt in the mountains before the invasion of other groups. Later Hodgson claims, after having examined matters from a linguistic point of view, to have traced a link between the Chepang and one of the Bhutanese tribes, the Lhopa.

Although it is almost impossible historically speaking to document a Lhopa incursion into Nepal, according to Hodgson it is possible that some groups belonging to the Bhutanese population may have been forced to emigrate from their region because of some natural disaster, a theory which is hazardous but which Hodgson firmly believed in for the rest of his life.

Two decades later, another British scholar, X. Y. Forbes, carried out accurate linguistic studies on the tribes of presumed Tibeto-Burman languages, and refuted these theories of Hodgson's on the Chepang, Kusunda and Hayu.

According to Forbes, the words in common in the Chepang and Lhopa vocabulary actually derived from common roots shared by a great many dialects used in Nepal, Tibet and the whole of this part of Asia in general. By setting down some words and applying some linguistic tests, he grouped together the in the west of Nepal with the Arracan hill tribes and those in the south and east of Brahmaputra so as to demonstrate the connection between these and Burmese.

Forbes' theory is that around one thousand three hundred years ago the whole sub-Himalayan area was occupied by tribes allied with the Chepang and by Arracan hill people. These groups must have been violently expelled from the central areas of Nepal by the incursion of the Newar who took possession of the country and who, even today, still live in the valleys of Kathmandu.

Another brief note on the Chepang appeared in 1894 in the work of Eden Vansittart, Captain of the V Gurkhas which, after a brief introduction which reports some of Hodgson's points on the Chepang (referred to by him as Chepong), Kusunda and Hayu, states that:

‘...they have no apparent affinity with the civilised races of the country, and seem like fragments of an earlier population. They pay no taxes, acknowledge no allegiance, and live entirely on wild fruits and the produce of the chase. They hold no intercourse with the people about them, but are inoffensive; they appear to be gradually dying out, and will probably be extinct in a few generations.’<sup>34</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Hodgson, B. H. 1857, op.cit., p.45.

<sup>34</sup> Vansittart, E. 1894. Tribes, Clans and Castes of Nepal. *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*. Calcutta.

It is a real pity that these scholars of the nineteenth century did not note any of the religious aspects of the Chepang or any of the other important cultural features.

After these writings there is a long period of silence during which no interest was shown in these ethnic groups and it is not until after the first half of the twentieth century that any further studies were made of the by western and Nepalese scholars. There are only a few articles and essays which were written during and round about the sixties<sup>35</sup>.

As far as western studies are concerned, we shall quote the articles by Corneille Jest on the Chepang which were published in 1966; another work before that by René von Nebesky-Wojkowitz, which was written a few years before this but in which it is debatable whether the author had ever actually met any Chepang; the brief essay written by Johan Reinhard in 1969 on the Kusunda, which appear to have become extinct and the studies carried out by Michailovski on the Hayu language.

In studies conducted by the Nepalese, the Chepang are quoted by one of the most important Nepalese scholars, Dor Bahadur Bista, at the end of the sixties, in an important work which lists all the different features of the ethnic groups in Nepal.

There is then an excellent doctoral thesis, written by the Nepalese ethnologist Nivak Rai, which features the economic activities of the Chepang. This is probably one of the best works available on the Chepang though it only briefly touches on their religion.

After this work there are another two works carried out by another two Nepalese ethnologists, Ganesh M. Gurung and Prem Swoveet.

While G. M. Gurung's work provides some very helpful information, P. Swoveet's work reflects a castal and classist tendency when writing about the Chepang, depicting them as 'the good savages', honest, innocent, primitive and with very limited intellectual abilities, content in their extreme poverty as they are less sensitive and more ignorant than civilised people.

Unfortunately it is this type of writing which does the most damage to how this ethnic group is perceived by other groups and which induces the use of force, given the insistence on their weakness and innocence.

One or two other very short articles have appeared and are still appearing from time to time in Nepalese newspapers but none of these is worth noting here.

A fairly interesting but short essay appeared in one of the two recent volumes published in 1994 on the classification of ethnic groups in Nepal, written by Rajesh Gautam and Ashoke Thapa-Magar.

The bibliography on the Chepang is almost non-existent. It is only in more recent years that scholars, who for many years believed the Chepang to be extinct, have re-discovered an interest in this group. I have information on other ethnological projects carried out by foreigners on the Chepang who are considered to be extremely interesting for the history of Nepal and in general as bearers of a strong organic original culture, deemed most important as they could help to understand original cultural traits of other, more sincretistic, populations with a similar history to the Chepang.

### **Origins of the Chepang and myths relating to them**

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<sup>35</sup> Titles and information on different articles can be found in the bibliography.

Unfortunately, the origins of the Chepang are not certain and there are many theories which would have them be one of the sporadic cases of aboriginal peoples in the country.

The Chepang language has been defined as belonging to the linguistic group of Tibeto-Burman languages: up to one or two decades ago it was used by all the people belonging to this ethnic group. Nowadays, it is rapidly disappearing and is being replaced by Nepali, mainly spoken by the younger generations particularly in those areas nearest to fairly important centres or nearest to one of the few roads in the country, and in mixed villages where there is more than one ethnic group present. The Chepang language is still maintained in more inaccessible areas and, to a certain extent, during the recounting of stories and myths and, of course, shamanic seances, though both Nepali and Chepang are usually used. The members of this group have very definite and different ideas about their origins. The Chepang that Dor Bahadur Bista encountered, for example, believe that they are descended from the Kiranti (Rai-Limbu) who live in Sunathali, east of Dolkha<sup>36</sup>, while those that Corneille Jest encountered believe they descend from the Mahabarat<sup>37</sup> and others believe their origins are in the East of the country.

There are two different versions of the mythical origins of the group. The first, which is the oldest and actually that of the ethnic group, has it that the Chepang were created from stones, and in most versions, from stones found underneath the ground, in the Underworld, called *patal* (T362a), in the Hindu and Nepali languages<sup>38</sup>. This story is confirmed by the actual name of the group, which must originally have been '*Chebang*', the '*bang*' meaning stone in the Chepang language.

However, this version was only recognised as true by around half of the Chepang I encountered, the remaining members insisting that the story of the stones had been invented by the Brahmin or *Chetris* to denigrate them.

In fact these two castes do actually have an account which tells of how, during a hunt, the dog belonging to the god Rama, hero of the popular saga Ramayana, urinated on a stone and according to this account it was from this stone that the Chepang were then created.

There is a certain resistance to the denigratory positions taken by the Brahmin on the part of the *pande* and in general those people who realise the dignity of their own culture. One of these is Jit Bahadur Praja<sup>39</sup>, a particularly sage shaman who explained that he knew that the Brahmins had invented this story, but was completely unaffected by this as whoever wants to conduct a ceremony in Nepal has to use stones for one reason or another, and besides, the cult of the ancestors means that throughout the country this cult is in fact identified with stone cults. Therefore, even given that this denigratory story were to be false, the shaman was proud that the Chepang should be linked to one of the most important cult objects which is one of the most important symbols in Nepal.

However, there is also another myth surrounding the origins of the Chepang, of Hindu influence which, with the exception of some small variations, is well-known all over the country.

This myth was told to me by the old *pande* Narcing Praja in the district of Makwanpur:

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<sup>36</sup> Bista, D. B. 1987. *People of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Ratna Pustak Bhandar: p.98.

<sup>37</sup> Jest, C. 1966, op.cit., p.171.

<sup>38</sup> The same word is used in the Chepang language.

<sup>39</sup> Interviewed in the district of Chitwan, 09:04:1995.

‘We Chepang do not come from the stones, we are the descendents of Rama. Sita was kidnapped by Rama who had fallen in love with her, but people began to talk badly about her, as she was not considered to be pure. Rama ordered Laksman, his brother, to take Sita into the jungle and kill her. Laksman, however, was very fond of his sister-in-law and could not find it in his heart to kill her: so he waited until she fell into a deep sleep and left her there in the forest. He then returned home and told his brother Rama that he had killed Sita.

Sita was the daughter of a hermit who lived in the jungle where his daughter had been abandoned. When the old hermit came to hear of what had happened, he sought out the woman who in the meantime had given birth to a son, and, when he recognised her, he took her and the child into his hut.

One day Sita went to the bank of the river to wash clothes, and left her son unattended; when she turned her head in the direction of the hut, she saw a monkey giving milk to her child.

Sita was jealous and thought to herself

After she had returned to the hut, Sita took the child with her without telling her father the hermit.

When the hermit came back, he did not see the child in the cradle and started to worry, he then decided to gather some *kush* grass (T102b, *Poa cynosuroides*) and made it into the figure of a child to which he gave life. Sita’s father then put the child back in the cradle.

When Sita came back from the river, she found the other baby and asked her father whose it was.

The hermit explained what had happened and Sita decided to raise both children. Her son was called Lhoari and the child which had been fashioned from the *kush* grass, Kushari. The Chepang are descended from Lhoari and the Kusunda from Kushari.’

When they grew up the two brothers became enemies: the origins of this hatred can be found in various myths. According to the one I have recorded, which was told to me by the shaman Dam Bahadur Praja, the two brothers had grown up in harmony in the jungle with their mother, quite ignorant of the events that had taken place after the birth of Lhoari. When they had grown up, the boys began to want to know who their father was, though Sita would never tell them.

When they were old enough, the two brothers began to go into the jungle to hunt with bow and arrow and both proved to be extremely good. While they were hunting, the boys would shout out that they were the sons of Rama though they had no idea why they did so. Every day, when they returned to the house from hunting, they both asked Sita who their father was, but Sita would not tell them. The two children decided to resort to magic to uncover the secret: every evening, after they had returned from the jungle, they would ask for toasted maize, and again the morning after.

One day, Lhoari and Kushari waited until their mother had finished cooking the maize and soya beans and asked her to lay the food on the floor. When she bent down to do as they had requested they both grabbed hold of her wrists firmly and again asked her who their father was. Sita was thus forced to reveal the secret: Lhoari found out that he was the son of Rama and Kushari that he had come from the *kush* grass. The two brothers had always believed they were twins and so had everyone else who had met them, because when the old hermit had modelled the figure of a new child in the cradle with the magic grass, he had made it identical to the first child, Lhoari.

According to the myth told by the Chepang, the brothers became sworn enemies when they found out the truth of their different origins and this is what generated the hatred between the two tribes of the Chepang and the Kusunda.

In a short article published in the journal of the only university in Nepal<sup>40</sup> there is a different version of the enmity between the two groups.

The myth tells that when Lhoari and Kushari grew up, they were both quite good at using the bow and arrow. One day they decided to compete against each other on

<sup>40</sup> Caughley, R. C.; Dahal, B. M. and Bandhu, C. M. 1971. Notes on the Chepang Culture. *Journal of Tribhuvan University* 6. Kathmandu: pp.77 - 89.

condition that the one who lost would have to move out towards the western part of the Narayani river and never show his face again.

The two brothers were supposed to make a hole in two stones of the same dimensions with their arrows. They both tried all day but neither was successful: as it was now night, the competition was postponed for the next day.

But while Kushari was sleeping soundly, Lhoari went to the place where the competition had taken place, put a hole in the stone and covered it with cow dung.

The next day Lhoari obviously beat Kushari and the latter was forced to leave for the west: it was then that the two brothers became enemies.

There is yet another myth regarding this matter which, chronologically speaking, would appear to be more recent: that Lhoari desperately wanted to be a farmer and Kushari desperately wanted to continue his life as a nomadic hunter living in the jungles and forests.

The child born of the magic grass tried to convince Lhoari to stay with him, but he refused. Kushari then decided to steal his brother's ploughshare and ran off into the jungle. From that day onwards a great hatred was born between them.

The Chepang still fear the Kusunda even today, and most people believe that if a Chepang meets a Kusunda in the jungle, their first reaction will be to lift an arrow so as to kill their rival.

Unfortunately, the interesting Kusunda would appear to be extinct, though one is never sure what one might encounter in a country like Nepal.

The last and perhaps only serious essay on this group which was written by Johan Reinhard in 1969<sup>41</sup> describes the situation where the group is nearing extinction, with only a few family groups left, only some of which were completely formed by the Kusunda.

What is interesting is that according to the data collected in this article and other short works, the Kusunda were never aware of the hostility existing between the two groups and none of them would have thought themselves enemies of the Chepang.

Even today the Chepang are extremely afraid of the Kusunda, though they have never actually come into contact with any of them personally.

In fact, the Kusunda may actually have had and perhaps still have something in common with the Chepang: nomadic hunters, living isolated in the jungle, who refuse any contact with other groups and in general with the rest of Nepalese society, can no longer be conceived by the Chepang alongside the farmers who are sedentary and part of a different system.

There can only be hostility between the two parts and this is represented by the enmity between the two brothers, most of all, the more recent account of enmity which saw Lhoari become a farmer and Kushari go against him in an attempt to force him to return to a freer life in the forests.

It is strange that the positive figure in the myth, which we must point out was told by the Chepang and not the Kusunda, is that of Kushari. In the account of the competition with the bow and arrow, it was Lhoari who used trickery to overcome his brother in order to distance himself from him; while in the account of the two brothers, one who wanted to turn to farming and the other to hunting, Lhoari makes no attempt to convince Kushari to become a sedentary farmer. Kushari, on the other hand, goes as far as stealing his brother's most precious possession which was used for cultivating the land, the ploughshare, in an attempt to dissuade his brother from becoming a farmer. Kushari escapes into the jungle with the precious object and

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<sup>41</sup> Reinhard, J. 1969. Aperçu sur les Kusunda, peuple chasseur du Népal. *Objets et Mondes* IX.

Lhoari is forced to follow him, and it is perhaps this vain chase which takes place in a world that has been abandoned but for which there are still feelings of nostalgia, that the feelings of hatred between the two brothers, who are much more than twins, are born, thus incarnating the two specular aspects and tensions in a single individual.

Even in the account where the two brothers are in perfect agreement up to the time when they discover their different origins, rejection and hostility are only born when they both realise the diversity of two figures who are identical in appearance.

The account tells of how the twins would feel the compelling need to go into the forest to hunt every day with their bows and arrows which made them invincible. In fact, the Chepang were famed throughout Nepal as the best archers in the country.

The wise mother Sita attempts to maintain the equilibrium which can only exist if the two brothers, who are in fact one, believe themselves to be equal, though she is forced to give in when confronted by the magic used by the brothers.

Lhoari learns he is descended from the noble and divine Rama; Kushari from the *kush* grass, the most sacred element in the plant world<sup>42</sup>. It is this very origin which makes Kushari belong to the world of the forest which is in fact what he is made of. On the other hand, although the Chepang recognise the sacred qualities of *kush* grass, they do not retain the plant to be sacred and do not use it in their rituals as the Brahmin do.

Most of the accounts about the two brothers may have existed before the Chepang came into contact with the Hindu religion.

Many ethnic groups in Nepal have myths recounting their origins which relate their descent from various brothers. Amongst these is the myth about the Hayu or Vayu, the third 'broken tribe' examined by Hodgson, and another three groups which are particularly interesting for the appearance of, amongst other things, a drum which was probably shamanic. The account, collected by Boyd Michailovsky<sup>43</sup>, tells of how the mythical ancestors of the Hayu had to transport a sacred drum from Lanka to Palanka, in the south. It was believed that Palanka was the mountain after Lanka. But, when they arrived at Murajor, the sacred drum began to make a sound to say that it would no longer continue. The mythical ancestor of the Hayu was the youngest of four brothers and he decided to stop there with the drum. The other three went on and settled in different areas, thus creating the Rai, Limbu and Sunwar groups.

Some elements of the Hindu tradition of the Ramayama can be found in the Chepang accounts. In the Ramayama, the twins are called Kusha and Lava and they are both sons of Rama who were born while Sita was exiled in the jungle. Sita had been exiled because her husband had heard of the rumours about her doubtful virtue which many believed to have been sullied during her long imprisonment at the court of Ravana, the King of Lanka.

Sita remained in the forest for about fifteen years, together with the hermit Valmiki, the author of the Ramayama, who, according to Hindu tradition, is not her father as Sita was the daughter of Janaka, one of the kings of Videha. In the end, Rama recognised his sons who became the kings of the Kosolas region in the south and the Kosolas region in the north after his death.

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<sup>42</sup> For the Hindu religion, *kush* grass (also spelt *kus*; T102b, *Poa cynosuroides*), which belongs to the *Graminae* family, is the most important and sacred of all grasses and is used in almost all sacrificial rites. This plant is mainly found in Nepal and India, in areas where the climate is hot and dry: it has a round stem, straight and rigid with many sharp lance-like leaves and a conical panicle with many small ramifications. It flowers during the monsoon season.

<sup>43</sup> Michailovsky, B. 1973. Notes on the Hayu language. *Kailash* 1 (2). Kathmandu.

Therefore, leaving to one side how the myth started and the reasons which led Sita to live in the jungle, there are not many points in common with the Chepang version which probably stemmed from a different tradition.

The figure of Rama is completely irrelevant to the life and events lived by the twins and the god is only mentioned at the beginning of the first myth to justify the origins of the group from a divinity. None of the Chepang interviewed about this has confirmed the opposite and everyone, even those from different districts in Nepal which are quite far apart, has confirmed that Rama probably never discovered the existence of or cared about the two brothers, in contrast with the Hindu saga.

It is interesting to note that, long before the Ramayama, Sita was the sign of the furrowed earth, personified in the form of a female goddess of agriculture, and was often symbolised by a ploughshare. The furrow, which is in fact ploughed in order to receive seeds, was associated with the female genital organs. For this reason the heroine of Ramayama, who was born of a furrow during the ritual ploughing carried out by her father, is given the name Sita and bears the surname Ayonija, literally speaking, 'not born of the womb'.

This tradition is known both in India and in Nepal. Is it not a coincidence that in the Chepang myth, Sita or the furrow of earth and stones and therefore linked to the underground, should be the mother of Lhoari, the forefather of the Chepang, whose main myth recounts their origins as being from the kingdom of the *patal*, the Underworld and in particular from the stones to be found there?

Not only was Sita born of the earth and under-soil, but she actually returns to it at the end of her adventures, in the arms of the goddess of the Earth who she had invoked.

Moreover, Sita as a furrow and goddess linked to agriculture is well suited to the myth which separates the worlds of agriculture and hunting, with the twins. Lhoari, a future farmer according to one of the stories, is the real son of Sita, while Kushari belongs to a world which is savage, symbolised by the *kush* grass which cannot be cultivated.

In the light of this interpretation, I feel it would not be wrong to say that the two brothers both represent the Chepang. The two brothers are described by those belonging to this group as being absolutely identical and impossible to tell apart. In fact *kush* grass has been used in Hindu tradition for a long time and is still used today to fashion bodies of dead people during funerals.

This happens mainly when a person dies away from their own village: an effigy of the person is made out of *kush* grass which is as similar as possible to the dead person; the effigy is called '*kush patrika*' and is burnt on the funeral pyre instead of the dead person.

In the same way, when a Hindu dies at a time which is particularly inauspicious, another five figures are fashioned of the dead person from *kush* grass and these are burnt on the funeral pyre together with the real body in order to ward off bad luck.

It may well be that these traditions have influenced the myth about the origins of the Chepang, in which Kushari is given exactly the same body as Lhoari, and was created in order to take the place of his brother, and was so alike that not even their mother Sita would have been able to notice the exchange but for the fact that she had had her real child with her.

The two figures must be in antithesis to each other, they can only live in conflict given that they cannot live in the same place at the same time once they find out the secret of their different origins.

Lhoari and Kushari are the mirror image of two realities belonging to the one person, but also of the two unsurmountable congenital differences and can only be deadly enemies. Any possibility of peaceful co-existence is denied and both figures continue to exist only because one of them distances himself, in a sort of exile which was enforced by a competition or through a real escape into the depths of the forest where the other brother will not be able to follow despite the fact that his precious ploughshare has been stolen.

Kushari must then become the mythical forefather of another people, different to that of Lhoari. Their children, despite the fact that they are cousins, must perpetuate the hostility of their fathers and this is where the blind and unfounded fear that the Kusunda could kill a Chepang, who will be unable to defend himself as he has renounced the bow and arrow, stems from.

The Kusunda encountered by Reinhard believed their origins were linked to the Thakuri caste, to which the Kings of Nepal belong. According to their accounts, a long time ago, when dying, a King left his fields and buffalos to the oldest of his three sons. The son began to plough and sow to no avail; he milked a buffalo but obtained blood instead of milk. When he massaged one of his legs with oil, a sinister black man came out of his leg and disappeared. The younger brother told the oldest brother that because of these ominous omens he would never be able to become King and would have to retreat into the forest. The Kusunda were therefore descended from him. The second son then began to plough and sow seeds and was successful and the Thakuri are descended from him. The third son was the forefather of the Magar. Reinhard goes on to say of the Chepang that:

'The Chepang, a group which lives to the south of the Kusunda area, believe to be related to them.....One of them told me that a long time ago a father wanted to see his fortune divided amongst his two sons; but after his death the two sons fought it out for their inheritance, and their descendants, the Chepang and Kusunda, have remained enemies ever since. The Chepang are still afraid of the Kusunda despite never having met one, they believe that the latter would shoot at them on sight with their bows and arrows while they would not have any arms with which to defend themselves. The Kusunda are not aware of the fact that they are the enemies of the Chepang and have denied that they are related to them.'<sup>44</sup>

The myth about the origins recounted by the Kusunda has nothing in common with that of the Chepang and is, interestingly to say, in total contrast to this.

In the Kusunda myth the oldest son of the King, on the death of his father, begins to work as a farmer and cattle rearer and it is only on seeing the premonitory omens that culminated in a sinister black man coming out of his leg that he understands that he does not belong to this world or this type of activity that, on the advice of his brother, he decides to go to live in the jungle. Let us note that, in the various versions of the Chepang myth, Kushari and Lhoari would go hunting together before they became enemies, and were both good archers. Only later was one of the two brothers to have distanced himself from the world of the forest to dedicate himself to a sedentary life and to farming, rejecting or throwing back his twin to the jungle, uncaring, according to one of the versions of the myth, of any attempts on the part of the brother who had stolen the implement to try to bring back his twin and regain their previous unity.

Kushari was to disappear into the jungle and become an unknown quantity which provoked feelings of fear. At the same time, in Chepang accounts told by older members of the group there is a sense of nostalgia for a mythical period which they

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<sup>44</sup> Reinhard, J. 1969, op.cit., pp.99 -100.(My translation)

have never actually experienced but which is thought of and part of most of the culture of this group, although it is actually still intimately linked to the forest and wild jungles.

## Social structure and ceremonies connected with the life cycle

Before examining the Chepang religion, the subject of this work, in more detail, I deem it necessary to make a brief reference to the uses and culture as it is widely practised by the Chepang in general. This only touches on a subject which would obviously merit further study. No previous work has set out the ethnological data necessary for an overall picture of the life of this group. Besides, anything to do with the existence, economy or ceremonies connected with the life cycle are firmly linked to the religious sphere and in particular to the figure of the *pande*.

The Chepang live in villages which have an average of anything from ten to twenty dwellings, usually located very far apart from each other and these accommodate large patrilinear families. There is no village headman, but the oldest male member of the family functions as the guide and it is he who has the last word on important decisions.

In the event of litigations arising from disputes about territorial confines, the two or more contendants, if they are not able to reach an agreement, will turn to the oldest and most respected shamans of the village who will advise on what action to take. Although the *pande* do not function as real headmen, they do have an important function as guide for the whole community and their word is usually sufficient to resolve even the most complicated of cases. The group is divided into various clans: almost all the Chepang agree that there are twenty-two different *thar* (T294a) or *jat* (T213b), which means clan in Nepali, but hardly anyone can remember their names. It is commonly believed that the clans, or at least most of them, were formed fairly recently.

In fact there are groups which live in more isolated areas who retain the original characteristics of the ethnic group and who have not been subject to migrations. These groups do not recognise the *jat* which is often completely unknown to them. The different members of the clan must marry outwith the clan and any exception to this rule would be considered incestuous.

Where the groups are not divided into *jat*, those belonging to one extended family may not marry anyone of the same lineage for at least seven generations.

The recent formation of clans would appear to be confirmed by the fact that they do not trace themselves back to any one mythical ancestor; all the Chepang, irrespective of which *jat* they belong to, being descended from Lhoari. In most cases the names of the clans are linked to geographical locations from which whole groups of Chepang have moved in search of more arable land.

Those Chepang who believe their origins lie in the *patal* and therefore in the Underworld, have an interesting myth which explains the origins of the clans. These would stem from ancient mythical forefathers who have no name and in particular from the elements of the Earth, mainly plants, under which or within which they were supposedly born:

‘The Chepangs originated directly from the Earth, in the Chepang traditional region. They are not migrants. When the ancestors came directly out of the Earth, they come out at different places. Thus, their clan name was determined by the place of their origin.’<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Rai, N. K. 1985, op.cit, p.7.

The myth goes on to list some of the names of the different clans: Darsirange, from the foot of the *sal* tree (*Shorea Robusta*); Galsarange, from the black earth; Dhusrange, from the red earth; Tisir Mai, from the swamps; Baspure, from the bamboo.

In fact, there are many more than twenty-two clans. These are the names of the different *jat* which I collected, with the reason for the name given wherever possible.

Broso : this name was taken from the village of Brosbaun.

Rom : from the village of Rovanjua.

Bare : or from the village of Baretali.

Jaringe : the origins of this name are curious. The term *jarung-nhal* is used to describe children born of successive marriages. The term *jar* indicates the sum of money that is given by a woman's new husband, who has to pay her previous husband when she leaves him so as to re-establish order<sup>46</sup>.

Rukbote : from the village Rukpatali.

Kurangi.

Krupdin.

Jongrangi.

Biyal : the Chepang use this term to describe the children born of a marriage between Chepang men and women from other ethnic groups, especially Newar women. Their children and therefore successive descendants are called *biyal* and are considered to be Chepang.

Kachare : because they come from a particularly distant and wild area of Nepal, known by the name of Kakara or Kacchar.

Mulunghe : this term refers to the ancestors of this group who used the *phalaknu* as a means of expression. This Nepali term is used to describe the typical manner convulsive and broken speech, at times murmured, shouted or sung which is typical of trance conditions<sup>47</sup>. The descendants of these first ancestors continue to be known by the same term, though they have lost this peculiarity.

Guabane : term used to describe those occupied in the rearing of animals.

Gurau : this is the term used throughout the country to describe the particularly powerful shamans of the Terai plain, though they are not necessarily Chepang. These shamans are supposedly able to turn themselves into animals, and have a preference for the tiger. However, according to the Chepang, this term has the same meaning as for other groups, but is only applicable to one particular clan whose ancestors were able to change their form. In fact, the Chepang believe this group to be extinct and agree that in any case it is not the case that anyone who belongs to this *jat* today still has these powers.

Bandele.

Duwakote : from the village of Duwa.

Pachabaiya : according to all the Chepang in Nepal, the only common deity -which we will examine in more detail later on, is the god of hunting, Namrung. This god is often called Namrung Pachabaiya though different traditions also mention the Namrung brothers. Of these brothers, those with the surname Pachabaiya supposedly only accept offerings of milk, not blood. The few members of this clan I met were not able to explain why their *jat* had been given this name.

<sup>46</sup> This word has come from the Nepali, which uses the term *jari-kal* (T215b); the term used for adultery is *jar* (T215a) and that used for children born outside of wedlock *jarai* (T215b).

<sup>47</sup> The term *phalaknu* can be used to mean 'mutter or cry incoherently' (T402b), but its main use is to describe the typical manner of speech used by the shamans.

### Titun.

Nivak Rai has listed quite another series of clans (Paniu Rana; Darbai; Bandeu Rana; Kanshi Rana; Lyahi Rana; Typsipo etc.) which were probably found in geographical areas quite different to mine, and together with the above list that makes a total of over twenty-two.

It would seem that the names of the different *jat* are given for different reasons, in particular depending on the geographical origin, occupation, features peculiar to their ancestors, and on the state of being Chepang but born of a mixed marriage and so on.

When asking the inhabitants of a village about their clan and why they exist, many explained that the *jat* system was formed in order to regulate marriages.

The old and wise *pande* Narcing Praja told me that the *jat* have not always existed and that they still do not exist in many areas. However, because of the frequent migrations the Chepang are subject to and to changes in the social order which have reinforced the need to congregate in villages, the marriage system had become quite complicated. As already mentioned, the Chepang who have no knowledge of the clan system still cannot marry anyone descended from the same lineage for seven generations. However, migratory movements which have meant that groups of Chepang who have had to move around the country and join up with others who have arrived from different areas with the same needs, have meant that it was no longer possible to be absolutely sure that the chosen bride did not belong to the same lineage without the seven generations having passed. According to Narcing this was the logic behind the the formation of the clans which thus made it easier and safer for marriages, which had to and still have to be exogamic, to take place.

### **Marriage**

Several types of marriage exist within the Chepang, all of which are accepted. One of these is the arranged marriage which can be arranged by the respective parents when the future couple are still children. Preference is for marriage to take place between cross cousins though there is a long list of possible matches.

In any case, after the families have reached an agreement, the children must wait until they are at least adolescents before celebrating the actual marriage for two reasons: first because they must have developed physically and also because the bride still has the right to choose and this right is greatly respected.

Both arranged marriages and those born of love must use a certain type of ceremony. In the days before the wedding, the groom goes to the bride's house with a gift of *raksi* (T525b) - the typical Nepalese liquor - for his future in-laws and the girl is once again asked if she intends to accept him. If the answer is positive, the prospective son-in-law must offer the *raksi* a further four times to the parents of the bride who may ask other things which the boy cannot refuse. On the day of the wedding, the *pande* - or in his absence the head of the family, has an important role to play. One of the peculiarities of this ethnic group is that all ceremonies are carried out in the presence of the *pande* without the intervention of a Hindu priest as is the case with many other groups.

Although many of the different ceremonies connected with the life cycle are sometimes carried out according to some of the Hindu regulations, the Chepang do not retain it necessary to turn to the Brahmins and believe the *pande* to be more than capable of carrying out the various rites.

On the day of the wedding ceremony the *pande*, usually part of the bride or groom's family, must purify the area where the celebration is to be held as well as all the

guests. The shaman takes the bride to the altar which has been appropriately prepared and the father of the bride simply hands her over to her husband.

When the new bride goes to the husband's family's house, as the dwelling is mainly virilocal<sup>48</sup>, the oldest man in the house, preferably but not necessarily a *pande*, must make offerings of incense to the ancestors, and ask them to welcome the new member of the family. When women get married, they effectively abandon their *jat* and become part of that of their husband.

Although this form of marriage is quite common, it is even more common practise for the bride to be kidnapped or for the couple to elope, mainly for financial reasons, as very few Chepang would be able to cope with the expenses of a wedding ceremony.

In the first instance the girl does not have to agree, but, when the kidnapping has taken place, she must give her consent, first in private to the suitor, then in public when the couple has returned to the village. In the event that the girl does not give her consent she returns to her parents' house.

Eloping takes place after both parties have given their consent, and often has the help of relations or friends. The two lovers flee to some secret place in the jungle and stay there for a few days. They then return to the village, often giving a symbolic sum of money to the girl's parents. In neither of the abovementioned cases is there a ceremony, except for that of making offerings of incense to the ancestors of the groom. Both these practices are accepted by the whole community and are common practice.

In general, wherever there is the possibility, the parents of the bride should provide her with a dowry, usually in the form of animals: hens, goats, pigs, water buffalo or cows, according to the financial possibilities of the family in question, and fruit bearing plants. A plant with particular significance in Hindu tradition is the *chyuri* (*Bassia Butyracea*) whose fruit can be used to make a form of oil and vegetable butter, often sold by Chepang women as well as being destined for family consumption.

The woman is the sole owner of the gifts given to her by her parents and maternal uncle, she also owns any fruit these may bear over the years as well as any eventual financial gain made by the selling of these. The husband may not profit from his wife's dowry and any attempt to violate this regulation is severely condemned by the whole community.

The practise of levirate and sororate marriages is quite common amongst the Chepang, though they are never really enforced. Widows are permitted to marry the man of their choice although there is a certain preference for the deceased husband's brother.

It would appear that there is a certain equality of the sexes within Chepang society, and this is even more evident in the event of divorce. It is not only men who may leave their wives and wives may also leave their husbands to return to their parental home or live with another man. In the latter case, the second husband must give the first husband a sum of money, called the *jar*, as we mentioned previously when dealing with the Jaringe clan. If this woman then falls in love with a third man and runs off with him, the third husband is required to give exactly half the sum given to

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<sup>48</sup> There are also some uxori-local dwellings as well as dwellings set up by newly weds who often decide to live on their own after a brief sojourn at their in-laws, often because of disputes which may have taken place between the brothers or sisters of one family or the other.

the first husband by the second and so on until the fourth. After the fourth marriage, which is quite rare, the next husband is not required to pay his predecessor anything.

Polygamy is accepted by the Chepang though very rarely used, also because it has been made illegal in Nepal through legislation to that effect. The most common form of polygamous marriage is that in which the man has married two or more sisters either contemporaneously or successively, which happens when the first wife<sup>49</sup> is thought to be barren and generally only comes about with her approval.

### **Rites of birth, childhood and adolescence**

Some time before the child is born, the wife moves back to her parents' house as long as she is not too far away in order to be assisted by her mother.

After the child is born, the mother is considered to be impure for a short period of time, usually anything from five to eight days, at the end of which a purification ceremony is held for the newly born child, during which the name is also given. Purification ceremonies are usually carried out by a *pande* on the part of the wife's family, although in some cases they may be carried out by the head of the family.

A small fire is lit on the veranda outside the house and various aromatic branches are placed on it on which water is then poured so as to create the smoke through which the shaman passes the body of the child several times. After that, threads are tied round the child's wrists, ankles and waist which are supposed to cover the child in a sort of magical reticule to protect it from witches or malign spirits; a piece of the same thread is also tied round the mother's wrist.

During this ceremony, the newborn child is also given a name, after which the house and surrounding area are purified. Then the most delicate part of the rite follows; every time a child is born, the Chepang *pande* must make offerings to the god Aitabare, god of Sundays. This god is married to a powerful witch who is attracted by children's crying and could devour their souls. By sacrificing an animal in honour of the husband, they try to appease the wife and at the same time attract the attention of Aitabare in the hope that he try to keep his wife under control. The sacrifice always takes place during the day, fairly far off from the house, usually in nearby fields as it is believed that Aitabare is usually accompanied by other spirits who, attracted by the smell of blood, could endanger the life of the newborn child or even its mother.

In the years following this a further two ceremonies are held as the child grows up, both also celebrated by other ethnic groups, the difference being that, as we have already mentioned, the only specialist religious expert to hold these ceremonies is the *pande*.

It must also be emphasised that although the presence of a shaman is preferred when purification rites are carried out, this does not apply to the following two rites. If there are no *pande* available in the family, these are often carried out by the head of the family.

These rites go by the name of *pasni* and *chewar* (T202b): the *pasni*<sup>50</sup> is held around six months after birth and sanctions the passage of the child from birth to being recognised within the community. During this rite, the child, be it male or female, will eat its first solids, rice, and is usually given this by his maternal uncle, who is a

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<sup>49</sup> Within a couple, the possible lack of children and therefore state of barrenness is always put down to the female.

<sup>50</sup> In Nepali the word *pasnu* means enter, accede to (T370b).

fairly important figure in the future education of the child. Before this rite and immediately afterwards, purification rites are carried out by the *pande* in question or, in the absence of a *pande*, by the head of the family.

Before the child eats its first solids, it is not considered either by its parents or the community to be a complete human being and in the event of infantile death, newly born children, with a few exceptions, do not have the right to a real funeral and are simply buried somewhere in the jungle, without much grief on the part of the parents.

This apparently somewhat detached behaviour on the part of the parents towards their newly born child, which lasts for the first six months, can definitely be explained by the fact that there is an extremely high infant mortality rate which can see a mother losing up to fifty percent of her children. This is without question a sort of self-defence mechanism which allows the mother not to suffer too much and prepare herself for starting another child.

The important *chewar* ceremony is held when the child becomes five years old. In the morning the parents of the child go to the house of the maternal uncle with gifts of liquor and ask him to return home with them. When they arrive back at the dwelling the uncle must shave the head of the child whose hair has never been cut before, and dress the child in new clothes which have been made specially for it. The uncle must then give the child a small sum of money and some gifts, which may vary in value, depending on his financial situation. If the child is female, no gifts are required but the uncle must give some indication of her future husband, with whom the parents must already have come to some form of agreement.

After this ceremony, male children are recognised as members of the community and treated in the same way as adults. They then start to work in the fields, and the female children are also required to look after younger children.

Female children have to go through another phase which ends with their first period. When this happens the girl must leave her parents' house and stay with friends or family for seven days, during which time she must purify herself, taking frequent ritual baths, and is not allowed to see her mother, father or brothers and sisters nor look at the roof of her house, as she is considered to be impure for the closest members of her family.

At the end of the seven days, a *pande* goes to visit her and carries out a final purification ceremony and, wherever possible, brings new red coloured clothes and gives her permission to return to her parents' house. Without the intervention of the shaman, the girl would be impure and would not be accepted back into the family. After menstruation has started the girl may marry, but this only usually happens one or two years later.

There is no real evidence of male initiation. A separate study should be made of young people who, on being called to the profession by the divinities, then follow the profession of the shaman. In this case, after an initial period where a personal rapport is established between the novice and the gods or guiding spirit, the new shaman is recognised publically when he presents himself to the community during an important festivity which takes place annually called *Nwagi* or *Chhonam*, which will be examined later in greater detail.

For the ceremonies connected with childhood and adolescence rites, as with that of the marriage ceremony, the presence of the *pande* is often preferred though he may in certain cases be replaced by the head of the family.

It could be said, especially in the case of the *pasni* and *chewar* ceremonies which are decidedly Hindu in flavour and therefore perhaps fairly recent, that the role of the *pande* has in some way substituted a role that should perhaps have been played by a

Hindu religious specialist, which shows that the Hindu religion has penetrated the Chepang community, albeit at a fairly superficial level.

### **Death and the rites connected to it**

This section will deal briefly with the ritual connected with death. The funeral itself will be dealt with in the chapter on the role of the shaman as psychopomp. The only person to preside over funerals in the Chepang community is the *pande* and one of his most important functions is to accompany the soul of the deceased to the land of his ancestors. This point and the concept of the soul will also be discussed in greater detail at a later point.

When it is believed that a person is nearing death, the closest relations will take them out of the dwelling, usually to the veranda, and lie them down on a mat: it is believed that if a person dies in the house, as their soul is so light when it leaves the body, it could remain trapped in the roof, especially in the cord used to tie the branches together. This would be extremely dangerous for the family as an unhappy soul will certainly cause different misfortunes to happen.

Originally the Chepang would bury their dead, which is still the case with villages up in the high mountains, especially in the area of Kakkara; but actually, those who live near running water prefer to use the Hindu form of funeral which is in the form of cremation along the banks of the river.

In any case, even when the deceased are cremated, the ashes are buried in special places in the jungle, never close to each other or on the bank of the river where the cremation has taken place.

In villages where burial takes place, the body is tied to a bamboo carrier and taken to the area chosen for burial which is often located at the peak of a high hill. A hole is made in the ground to take the body of the deceased and straw is placed in it on top of which the body is then placed in supine position.

The few objects belonging to the deceased are placed alongside him and this is then covered over with earth. Over the grave the relations place a recipient made of terracotta or bamboo inside which offerings of foodstuffs are made which the soul will come to consume. All the stages are followed carefully by the *pande* who directs the family members thus ensuring that everything is carried out properly.

When a body is cremated the rites are carried out in similar fashion: the body is placed on the pyre and all the objects which had belonged to the deceased in life are placed on or around it. These could include agricultural equipment; fishing net, clothes and ornaments. If the deceased is a woman, then crockery and cutlery would be used, a knife in the case of a man and so on. The first born son places coins in the mouth of the deceased parent and, if they had been smokers, a cigarette or some tobacco.

During these preparations, the *pande* and the relations must guard the body which must in no way be touched by cats, rats, pregnant women, or anyone not of the Chepang (which is why the intervention of a Brahmin or other religious specialist is forbidden).

In the unfortunate event that any of these should happen, the spirit of the deceased would transform itself into a tiger or some other dangerous animal, and would attempt to destroy the crops or kill the animals belonging to his family and cause the latter to become seriously ill.

After the preparations are over, the pyre is lit and the ashes then buried, according to the procedures already described, the one difference being that, in this case, the shaman must also place a mixture of rice, stones and grasses in the small grave.

Despite the fact that cremation is widely used, it must be pointed out that even in villages which are located near rivers, many Chepang still bury their dead, mainly for financial reasons, as the wood used for cremations is expensive and often difficult to obtain.

In fact, after the violent deforestation which has taken place in Nepal which has damaged a large part of the country, it is now severely prohibited to cut down trees and anyone who needs wood must buy it at great cost. Obviously in the case of the remoter villages, this regulation is ignored as wood is a primary material used mainly as firewood and also for the construction of dwellings and animal shelters. The villages nearer more important centres or those under the control of the Praja Development Programme are different and their impoverished inhabitants are obliged to incur debts to buy wood for cooking.

This is one of the reasons why burial is preferred, especially for those children who die before the *chewar*, or hair cutting, ceremony takes place, before which the child is not considered to be a full member of the community and therefore it is not deemed necessary to give it a full cremation which is extremely costly.

The funeral itself which could be in the form of either a cremation or burial, during which an important nocturnal shamanic ceremony is held, actually takes place several days after these rituals, usually thirteen days afterwards, though this number tends to vary from place to place.

The ceremony takes place at night as, as I shall attempt to explain, the *pande* can never use his drum during daylight and cannot enter a state of trance without the drum which is absolutely essential for accompanying a dead soul into another world.

The lapse of time which there is between the death and the funeral is so that the soul or rather souls, as it is difficult to prove that there is only one of these, have time to remove themselves completely from the body and from the world of humans and ready themselves for the journey to the land of their ancestors.

This phase, which Van Gennep<sup>51</sup> has described as being the 'liminal' phase before the soul is congregated in the world of the deceased, is extremely delicate and dangerous and is a great worry to the family of the deceased.

There is an interesting account which was given to me at the same time by two Chepang shamans. The first of these, Bir Bahadur, was only a small boy when the events in the account happened to his father, and the second, Tulo Kancha, who is very old, was already an adult. The account starts with Bir Bahadur:

'When I was about three years old, my father died: in a moment of carelessness his body was touched by a cat before it had been cremated and then buried. My father had also been a shaman. The people who were attending the funeral saw something like a fly or butterfly come out of the deceased just before the body was burnt. It was probably then that the cat touched it: his soul was already awake and in the days after the ashes were buried, his soul returned to our house and made mournful noises. We could not see it as the soul was invisible, we could only hear it, and one night the soul even asked for a drink of water. We could not see anything, only hear it. All this began after the *pande* had conducted my father's funeral, thirteen days after his death. The people in the village said that if his spirit was awake, we should give it water to slake its thirst. The same *pande* who had conducted the funeral also advised us to do the same and he too was sure that the spirit of Ditta<sup>52</sup> was still wandering

<sup>51</sup> Van Gennep, A.1909. *Les rites de passage*. Paris: Émile Nourry. (Italian edition. 1981. *I riti di passaggio*. Turin: Bollati Boringhieri Editore.).

<sup>52</sup> Ditta was the name of Bir Bahadur's father.

about the village. So we started to put out a glass of water on the floor at midnight and in the morning the water had always disappeared. We went on like this for a few days and the *pande* told us to put out a bamboo plate with maize flour to feed the soul along with the glass of water. The next morning, we saw the footprint of a strange animal in the flour and that of a cat, a sure sign that the deceased spirit was awake. I was only three but I remember everything perfectly.'

At this point in the discussion, Tulo Kancha, a great man and *pande* who is now quite old and one of the most respected shamans in the district of Makwanpur, came in:

'I was also witness to these facts. One day we came upon the place where we had buried the ashes of Ditta and we saw that a strange animal, a sort of cross between a large mongoose and a rat, had dug a hole right on top of the grave. It was Ditta's soul which had been transformed into the animal. In these cases, a wise and powerful *pande*, usually a *gurau*<sup>53</sup> must be called in and kill the animal by using his knowledge and powers alone without having recourse to real weapons. If this does not happen, the spirit first begins to destroy the lives of his family and then those of the inhabitants of the village. Normally these types of souls are transformed into tigers but they can also assume the form of other animals like rats or mongoose. These animals can be recognised by the fact that they always have strange features: they may be missing the legs or face, or, if they have been transformed into birds, some of their articulations may be out of proportion. If the deceased had been married, the soul, which is invisible, goes to sleep beside its spouse every night. Though the spouse may not be able to see their partner, he or she is aware of its presence and can stroke it with his or her hand. It is extremely difficult to kill these animals, only extremely powerful *pande* can do so.'

In the case of Ditta's soul, the *pande* managed, thanks to various ceremonies which were kept secret from me, to kill the animal in which the spirit had been incarnated and thus the spirit was conducted away from the world of humans to the ancestral world from which there is no return.

In the thirteen days before the funeral, even the closest relations of the deceased are in a delicate position. The oldest son in particular must observe a series of taboos: he must shave his head completely, as well as any other bodily hair and can only eat food cooked by himself for the thirteen days and is not allowed to eat salt. No one is allowed to touch the food and the shaman assigns one of the relations the task of separating the rice to be cooked by the oldest son from that for the use of the rest of the family. The rice can only be served on a banana leaf and no cutlery can be used.

Many of the restrictions we have noted here are also used in the Hindu religion, which usually applies to all the sons in the family not just the oldest. Taboos must be supervised carefully by the *pande* who will conduct the funeral and must ensure that all takes place as it should so as not to disturb or offend the soul of the dead person which could put the whole community in danger.

It is believed that the soul of any person who has recently died could be dangerous, though those of people who have died in unnatural circumstances are particularly so, especially if the deceased has died in an accident, particularly drowning, which is a very frequent occurrence in the monsoon season when the rivers which have to be crossed in order to reach other villages or markets are particularly treacherous, or in the case of suicides which are unfortunately especially common amongst women.

In these cases, when an unnatural phenomena touches the life of the inhabitants of an entire village, it is believed that the souls are in some form of discomfort or are

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<sup>53</sup> As we have already said, these shamans are believed to be so powerful that they are able to change themselves into animals. The relationship between the shaman and his animal double is present in many groups, most of which have assistant spirits who assume animal forms. On this subject, see Vajda, L. 1959. Zur phaseologischen Stellung des Shamanismus. *Uraltaische Jahrbücher* 31: pp.456 - 485.

desperate, and are transformed into dangerous malign spirits, well known throughout Nepal, which are called *agati* (T4b) or *pisac* (T383a). It is this very category of spirits which brings misfortune and disaster to villages: the souls are dissatisfied and often turn against their family in the case of suicide or feel deeply wounded at having lost their life prematurely in accidents or because of illness, when they were nowhere near the end of their lives.

One of the most frequent reasons for holding shamanic seances is for the *jhakri* to be able to deal with these cases. These take place in most ethnic groups of the country, but are particularly the case with groups like the Chepang where people rarely die of old age.

*Agati* and *pisac* must be continually pacified by making offerings and only some of these will succeed, thanks to the intervention of the *pande*, in abandoning their condition of malign spirits which makes them wander the Earth endlessly in search of reaching the land of their ancestors.

The *pisac* in particular can appear years after their death and cause problems for the family. In this case, after the *pande* has discovered the spirit which is causing the illnesses or misfortune to the village inhabitant who is usually one of his relations, he must first try to render it harmless through offerings of food and then attempt to convince it, through the use of both threats and flattery, to allow itself to be taken to the land of its ancestors.

I believe that this may also be a form of funeral and shall explain my reasons for thinking so by looking at an example of a shamanic seance which was held for a similar case.

In December 1992, I attended two seances held to cure a Takhuri boy who had come to two very famous *pande* in the district of Makwanpur for help. The two shamans are husband and wife and I shall discuss them in some detail later on as for many years they were extremely instrumental in giving me information.

The name of the young man, who had been suffering from violent and uncontrollable trembling for some time, is Sham. This trembling would make him faint, and would be followed by periods of amnesia, when he would remember nothing of what had occurred. The crises would happen at any time during the day without any warning and would sometimes occur at night when sleeping. Before turning to the shamans for help, the young boy had gone to hospital several times but the medication prescribed had had no effect.

During the first seance, which was diagnostic, the *pande* were still not able to define the causes of Sham's disturbances: some particularly clever malign spirit was disturbing him but was not revealing itself.

It was therefore necessary to hold a nocturnal seance during which the *pande*, in a state of trance, would be able to discover the identity of the spirit and negotiate with him in order to leave the boy's soul in peace.

After the *puja* had started, Sham began to tremble violently and cry out, shouting that something was inside him and was taking over mentally and physically. Sham was obviously terrified and nothing the shamans could say would comfort him.

The *pande*, in a state of trance and chanting, began to look for the spirit and after a few minutes, were able to find him. The discovery of the cause of Sham's trembling calmed him for about half an hour, and the *pande* explained to Sham and the others present that this was a difficult case of an *agati* who was particularly against Sham's family. The shaman said he had met the spirit of a woman who had died prematurely by drowning and asked Sham for some clarifications.

He remembered that his father had often recounted that before he had been born, one of his aunts had drowned when she was swept away by the currents of a river. The body had been taken to the house of his father to await cremation. Thirteen days after the ashes had been buried, a *pande* had conducted the funeral and had warned Sham's father that as his sister's soul was not at peace he would therefore have to continue trying to pacify her for the rest of his life by making offerings and asking her to leave. Sham's father was old and did not celebrate ceremonies with the same assiduity as before. At the end of the account, Sham again began to tremble and the *pande* turned to the spirit, chanting:

*'...Can anyone hunt without reason ?  
Walk on ! Walk on! Walk on!  
Walk on, sometimes crying  
sometimes tormenting....  
Why did you come to this innocent young boy ?  
Why do you not come to me ?  
Water; water and fire.....  
the agati acting and moving around here,  
will be sent away by the pande.  
Come ! Come ! Come !  
Come again !  
You spirits cannot play....  
Someone has died,  
and now he will be sent away.'*

At the end of the seance the *pande* told the boy that the *agati* did not want to leave him yet and that for a period of seven days, small sacrifices would have to be made along the river bank at dawn. Before making each sacrifice Sham would have to wash himself completely in the water of the same river and would have to start talking to his aunt's spirit himself. The shamans told the boy to speak to the *agati* and say, .

At the end of the week, Sham felt much better and did not have any attacks. During the sacrifices the *pande* observed him carefully and held repeated ceremonies over the seven days to remove the spirit of the deceased from Sham's house and family once and for all. Eventually the spirit gave in and the shamans said they had pacified it forever and were satisfied that they had been able to conclude the funeral of the soul which had been wandering around the world of the living for so long. They did not want to say if the soul had gone to the land of its ancestors or some other place, but they did say they were sure it would never come back.

In the course of the following years I saw Sham many times and he said he had never again had any problems and had actually stopped holding the small family ceremony which his father had used to carry out in honour of the aunt.

Though the ceremony described above is quite clearly exorcistic, as were many of the other ceremonies I attended, it is quite clearly funereal in character and definitely linked to the complex relationship between the world of the living and that of the dead through the figure of the *pande*.

During these ceremonies in particular, contact must be established between the world of the living and that of the dead: Sham had never met his aunt, as she had died before he was born, he had only heard other relations speak of her. Contact was made by the shaman through the water of the same river which had taken the life of the aunt many years previously, and the fact that her nephew had to wash himself in the water every day. The *pande* recommended that the young boy never go to the bank of the river alone during those seven days as the spirit would have been able to take

possession of him quite easily and perhaps even lead him into the deep waters, thus causing his own death.

The shamans told Sham and those present that perhaps the spirit of the aunt was actually in pain because it was alone and it was perhaps because it wanted to belong to the world of the living again that it was causing these problems to her nephew.

It is actually only after this contact has been established and after offerings have been made by those relations still living to those who are no longer living, that it is possible to establish an equilibrium and bring funerals which had not been celebrated successfully up to tens of years previously to an end.

It is often the case that the *agati* and *pisac* do not agree to leave the world of the living forever in which case all the Chepang *pande* and Nepalese shamans in general can do is send them away from the village which has been affected for fairly long periods of time. These spirits can then only go to sleep or wander round the burial grounds or places where cremations take place, places dedicated to distancing the soul of the deceased and on the edge of the area between the world of the living and the world of the ancestors, which will culminate in taking the soul of the latter during the funeral ceremony conducted by the shaman.

## General features of Chepang Shamanism

In the different cultural contexts within which the shaman works, it is he who has the ability to bring about some form of mediation between the world of humans and the world of the spirits. The shaman moves quite freely between both of these worlds and himself crosses the borders between the different cosmic worlds in very much the same way as a hero.

Perhaps one of the first definitions, slightly short, but still valid, of Shamanism was given by the Russian ethnographer, Mikhailovski, who described the shaman as being '*an intermediary in the relationship man has with the world of the spirits.*'<sup>54</sup>

These relationships would be impossible and extremely dangerous if there were no individuals in the community in a position to deal with them, in different manner and form, in order to maintain an equilibrium between what is known and what is not known; health and illness; life and death; mankind and the supernatural.

There is a need for reassurances and certainties which distinguishes the thoughts, philosophy and actions of the human race and, in the culture and society he works in, the shaman is the main actor and font of the culture of the people he lives amongst as well as being a therapist, not in the limited western sense of the word, but in a much wider and complex sense: he cures various types of crises, be they individual or collective.

The shaman owes his power and knowledge primarily to the supernatural world and then, though this does not apply in all cases, to a more expert shaman. He has no use for either doctrine or dogma. Shamanic knowledge is mainly passed on orally, with very few exceptions<sup>55</sup>.

Shamanism has no use for the places usually suggested for the encounters between man and the gods, in other words churches and temples, as there is no need for them, given that it is the shaman himself who goes to the deities or who can bring them to the human world. This also means that the shaman has no need to worship sacred images which would only be pale imitations of a reality which is well known to them and has often been experienced by them. As far as I have been able to make out, they are familiar with these images which are represented in symbolic rather than descriptive form.

Robert N. Hamayon brilliantly noted that shamanic phenomena in the context of Siberia can be found both in tribal societies where they are very diffuse as well as in state societies though Shamanism is never given as the state religion<sup>56</sup>.

Shamanism has no priesthood and does not generally recognise a solid hierarchical structure of power amongst religious experts. It is above all a strictly individual

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<sup>54</sup> Mikhailovski, V. M. 1982. 'Shamanstvo'. *Izvestiya Imperatorskago Obshchestva lyubiteley estestvoznaniya, antropologii i étnografii* 75; Moscow: Trudi Etnogr. Old. 12: p.67.

<sup>55</sup> Shamanic testimonies and writings are very rare. For example, there are some pictographic writings belonging to the Na-khi minority of the Yunnan Chinese which are used for writing shamanic texts. For more information see Rock, J. F. 1962. *A Na-khi - English Encyclopedic Dictionary*. Serie Orientale Roma XXVIII (2 vol.). Rome: IsMEO. and Sani, C. 1995. I Nak-hi e la tradizione sciamanica himalayana. Mastromattei, R (ed.). *Tremore e Potere. La condizione estatica nello sciamanismo himalayano*. Rome: Franco Angeli Editore: pp.197 - 247.

<sup>56</sup> Hamayon, N. R. 1994. Shamanism in Siberia: From Partnership in Supernature to Counter-power in Society. Thomas, N. and Humphrey, C. (eds.), *Shamanism, History and the State*. Michigan: The University of Michigan Press: p.77.

experience which is destined to play its role in society in a second moment without ever losing sight of the individuality which permeates it, essentially basing itself on the ramifications of the personal rapport with the world of the deities and spirits.

This feature somewhat isolates the shamans both from the community which they belong to and from each other: the personal component within Shamanism is very strong, much stronger than that present in other religions known to us.

Even within the same group, on the basis of a behavioural model relatively common to different individuals, each shaman is the only possessor of his own pantheon and jealous custodian of his relations with guiding spirits and divinities which may actually be completely unknown to another shaman belonging to the same ethnic group who may even be living in the same village.

In spite of this, it must be noted that the slight variations in how shamans work and their rapport with the supernatural world are only a result of common experiences, beliefs and knowledge and only exist at a second level: any scholar looking into this matter cannot ignore the existence, contemporaneity, and the need for these two different levels. The shaman is completely on his own in his intimate relationships and representation of the supernatural. However, on the other hand, a series of stages, starting with the calling to the profession by the spirits, is common to most of those who decide to take up this profession which goes beyond the confines of one particular society and covers a vast geographical area.

It is common knowledge that Shamanism is supposed to have originated in Siberia but, as Hultkrantz points out:

‘Many specialized shamanic elements typical of Siberia may be found outside this area, probably as archaic residues of diffusion. This is the case in the Americas, where we certainly come across not only ecstasy, animal guardian spirit and a tripartite world, but also a notched tree with steps for the climbing shaman, as in Siberia - the tree being a ritual replica of the world pillar - and a drum that sometimes has the drum-skin painted with cosmic figures, exactly like the Siberian drum.’<sup>57</sup>

What this Swedish author wrote about Shamanism in America could also apply to other contexts, one of which Nepalese Shamanism, where almost all the characteristics of Siberian Shamanism can be detected and are used in most ethnic groups<sup>58</sup>.

There are many elements in Chepang Shamanism which can be traced to Nordic Shamanism which is of great interest in that Chepang Shamanism has been relatively little influenced by other religions: the first of these is the single membraned drum, on the other side of which there are a series of chains and iron hangings, very similar to that used by many Siberian groups. Secondly, the initiatory crisis and most accounts of the calling to the profession by the spirits and the kidnapping of the newly initiated by them are strikingly similar to those of Siberian Shamanism, as is the cosmic concept and the form of most of the seances.

In contrary to other Nepalese ethnic groups, there are no other religious specialists present in the Chepang community apart from the *pande*.

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<sup>57</sup> Hultkrantz, A. 1993. Introductory Remarks on the Study of Shamanism. *Shaman* 1 (1): pp.10 -11.

<sup>58</sup> The initiatory act of climbing the tree, which is symbolic of the cosmic pillar linking the three worlds, and the practise of painting pictures with cosmic content on the skin of the drums is present, for example, in the Magar, and has been well documented. For more information on this matter, see Oppitz, M. 1981. *Shamanem im Blinden Land*. Frankfurt am Main: Syndikat and De Sales, A. 1991. *Je suis né de vos jeux de tambours - La religion chamannique des Magars du Nord*. Nanterre: Société d’Ethnologie. There is also a lovely film (*Shamanem im Blinden Land*) made by Oppitz on the Shamanism of the Magar, which is one of the best documentaries on Shamanism in the Himalayas.

The many groups of Chepang I encountered and those studied by other ethnologists all use the term *pande* to describe the shaman; the only exception to this being the Chepang described by Nebesky-Wojkowitz who called the shaman *phalahi*<sup>59</sup> though, as we have already mentioned, there are some reservations about this short work.

The term *pande* may well be fairly recent, perhaps derived from the Hindu *pandit* or from the word *panda* which is defined in the Nepalese dictionary by Ralph Lilley Turner as describing a religious official who has inherited this function and presides over a temple.

With a few variations, this word seems to be fairly diffuse throughout South East Asia: some interesting tribes in Northern India, amongst which the Baiga and the Gond, have a ritual expert with shamanic qualities who has appeared fairly recently and is called the *panda*<sup>60</sup>. The smiths of Java and Bali<sup>61</sup>, which are known to be closely connected to the world of Shamanism, are also called *pande*.

The term *panda* used in a shamanic context, can also be seen in two texts belonging to the Yellow-Uighurs which were collected at the beginning of the century by Mavlov and translated by Ugo Marazzi<sup>62</sup>.

The first text was recited on the occasion of the Yaxqa ceremony and was directed at the celestial divinities:

*'...If you wrap yourself up in the habit of a lama, you will be like a young lama panda!'*<sup>63</sup>  
*If you put on the habit of a lama cörgi*<sup>64</sup> *you will be just like this cörgi !*  
*But if you take the shamanic bag round your neck, then you will be just like a shaman!'*

The second text which is known as a *susu* prayer, presents two invocations to the divinity *Panda*, which Marazzi presumes to be one of the initial grades of the lamaistic hierarchy, who has then become a shamanic divinity:

*'.....o god Panda, you who the celestial world will not accept !*  
 .....  
*.....O god Panda, you who travel in the city of men !*  
*I will say the susu prayer with a qaltar ram dedicated to Yerliq!*  
*I will carry out the magic rite in honour of Yerliq with the two curved horns (of the ram) as weapons!'*

This prayer is addressed to the god Yerliq who Marazzi recognises as the lord of the Underworld of the Yellow-Uighurs, originally *interpretatio* of the figure of the Indian god of death Yama.

Without wanting to force a link, it must be emphasised that, as we shall see later on, the god Yama is one of the more important divinities. He is also one of the most feared, as it is he who sends illnesses and death to man. Yama is invoked by Chepang shamans during numerous seances which, in these cases, also use two little curved horns which can be used as weapons against malign spirits.

<sup>59</sup> Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. von 1959. *Kusundas and Chepangs, Notes on two little tribes of Nepal. Bulletin of the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research* II: pp.77 - 84.

<sup>60</sup> Rahmann, R. 1959. Shamanistic and Related Phenomena in Northern and Middle India. *Anthropos* 54: pp.681 - 760.

<sup>61</sup> Eliade, M. 1977. *Forgerons et Alchimistes*, second edition, Paris: Payot.

<sup>62</sup> Marazzi, U., op.cit., Milan, 1990. The two texts are on pages 379 and 389. (My translation).

<sup>63</sup> Initial grade in the lamaistic ecclesiastical hierarchy.

<sup>64</sup> High grade in the lamaistic ecclesiastical hierarchy.

Chepong shamanic seances can take place for many reasons but the first of many differences lies in seances which take place during the day and those which are held at night.

The seances which are held during the hours of daylight are usually held for two reasons. They could be dedicated to particular divinities which will not accept sacrifices at night, or may be seances which I retain to be diagnostic in nature, during which there is an initial contact between the shaman and a patient who believes to have been affected by some supernatural illness. Before deciding whether a nocturnal seance is necessary, the *pande* must make an initial investigation into the nature of the condition affecting the patient.

The big difference between daylight and nocturnal ceremonies lies in the fact that during the first of the two, the use of the drum is absolutely prohibited and so the *pande* cannot enter into a condition of trance, though on certain occasions he may enter into a pre-trance like state.

On the other hand, during the nocturnal seances, the shaman works and acts with the help of the drum and it is through the states of trance which may vary in intensity that he is able to make cosmic journeys to the Heavens or into the Underworld, mainly in order to encounter the divinities and spirits who have brought on some sort of critical situation in the world of men.

In Eliade's famous work on Shamanism he indicates one of its main characteristics, though in my opinion it is not the only one, in these cosmic journeys:

'Shamanic technique consists of the passage from one cosmic region to another: from the Earth to the Sky, or from the Earth to the Underworld. The shaman knows the mysteries of how to break through the levels. The communication which takes place between the cosmic zones is made possible by the very structure of the universe. In fact, it is quite clearly divided up into three levels, the Sky, Earth and Underworld, which are all connected by a central axis.'<sup>65</sup>

During diagnostical daytime seances, the *pande* use divination to establish which supernatural being is disturbing the patient and, once they have established its identity, they can decide whether to hold a nocturnal ceremony to pacify the latter.

Illnesses are not always caused by magic and these initial contacts between the *pande* and the patient also give the *pande* the chance to explain to the patient that their condition is of physical and not supernatural origin, in which case there would be no point holding a seance. Obviously the dividing line between the two conditions is not clear and it may be that two patients with similar symptoms may be diagnosed by the *pande* in different ways, the origin of one condition being physical and the other supernatural.

Nocturnal shamanic ceremonies are held for different reasons which we will examine in brief here. Seances are most frequently held for therapeutic purposes though there are also seances which are divinatory in nature, when one or more people turn to the *pande* for information about their future or, for example, for information about people who have disappeared or moved away from the village. Seances can also be held within the community for the benefit of the whole village to ward off danger or epidemics or to control the rains and weather in general. Other seances are held during important festivals in the course of the year, in particular for the Chhonam festival which is linked to the ancestral cult and the festival dedicated to the god Namrung, lord of the hunt. Private seances are also held by the *pande* when

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<sup>65</sup> Eliade, M. 1951. *Le chamanisme et les techniques arhaïques de l'extase*. Paris: Payot. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 1968: p. 211.(My translation)

he is completely alone which are particularly interesting though the shamans themselves are reserved about them. There are also rites linked to funeral services during which the *pande* function as a psychopomp.

The trance is an absolutely essential part of these nocturnal seances, and it appears to be disordered and uncontrollable when a novice is being called by the spirits, though shamans tend to gain control of this gradually.

There have been many explanations of different natures, psychiatric and otherwise, of altered states of consciousness and the magic flight used by the shamans, most of which, particularly in the past, have been somewhat oversimplified and aim to establish a link between Shamanism and illnesses or mental disorder. In 1964 Tokarev stated that all scholars agreed that the shaman was a figure, often subject to epileptic fits<sup>66</sup>. The main problem is that many scholars have wanted to rigidly apply the terminology, concepts and categories of psychiatry or psychoanalysis to a reality within which there are multiple facets which can only be understood after making a serious and careful examination of the whole culture of the people. By simplifying matters, it is meaningless to abstract and extrapolate the trance or various other examples of altered states of consciousness, which there is some confusion about, from the cultural context in which these people act and which they are a part of and which gives them meaning. This constitutes a grave underestimation of the cultural and religious complex and reduces these states to a form of hysteria.

Field experience with the shamans themselves is absolutely fundamental: too many works, some of which are extremely valuable, have been written without the author having had any firsthand experience or observation of the Shamanism practised by one or more populations: the risks of overgeneralising are extremely high, especially when dealing with the matter of the trance.

The works written about twenty years ago which suggest that there are possible physical causes which could set off altered states of consciousness are interesting. These refer to the trance not as a form of hysteria or mental disorder, but as real chemio-physiological modifications which could potentially be experienced by other people too. In 1976, a chain of thirty-one amino acids called beta-endorphine were isolated and were found to have somewhat similar effects to the opium drugs. These are produced by the human body in certain conditions and received by certain nervous cells called receptors which are present in everyone and are responsible for this action<sup>67</sup>.

On the one hand this form of work has been decisively useful in discarding the notion that altered states of consciousness were of psychiatric nature, though they lead to a dangerous abstraction of these phenomena, and one ponders on the necessity of rationalising these to an extreme, outwith their cultural context and significance. Perhaps the best approach to the problem is that taken by Éveline Lot-Falck who wrote that in her opinion <sup>68</sup>

The best studies on this subject prefer to move in a different field by leaving to one side the possible medico-physiological developments of altered states of consciousness and differentiating between them by assigning them to different

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<sup>66</sup> Tokarev, S. A. 1964. *Rannie formy religii i ich razvitie*. Moscow: Politizdat: p.279. For a more detailed examination of the different schools of thought on shamanic trances, see Basilov, V. N. 1984. *Izbranniki duchov*. Moscow: Izd. Politiceskoj literatury.

<sup>67</sup> Prince, R. (editor). 1982. Shamans and Endorphines. *Journal for the Society for Psychological Anthropology*, *Ethos*10 (4).

<sup>68</sup> Lot-Falck, É. 1968. Religions de l'Eurasie septentrionale et de l'Artique. *Problèmes et méthodes d'histoire des religions*. Paris: p.45.

categories. These categories are appropriately cultural and closely linked to the religious sphere and context in which these phenomena are found.

The difference made between shamanic trances and trances caused by possession pointed out first by Luc de Heusch<sup>69</sup> and then by Gilbert Rouget<sup>70</sup> is of great interest in the accurate examination and specific definition of what is generally defined as 'ecstatic religions'. These indiscriminately group Shamanism and other different cults of possession together, such as African Voodoo and its different developments and ramifications found mainly on the American continent and the Caribbean.

Rouget emphasises how the shamanic trance and possession trance differ in three ways: the first consists of a journey taken by a man to the spirits and divinities; secondly the shaman can control the supernatural being that incarnates itself in him and finally, the trance is voluntary. On the contrary, a possession trance is caused when a spirit or divinity comes to man, it is the spirit who takes control of the man who he has decided to possess, and moreover, this form of trance does not take place voluntarily.

The term trance comes from the Latin *transire*, meaning to die, go beyond, move from one state to another and can be used to describe the various manifestations of various ecstatic religions, while the term ecstasy must have different meanings.

Rouget again brilliantly emphasises that ecstasy does not correspond to trance, and cannot be a synonym, as the first is caused by the deprivation of the senses characterised by immobility, silence, solitude, without there being any crises, and therefore the memory is unaffected and there are hallucinations; while the trance consists of an over stimulation of the senses characterised by movement, noise, possible social interaction, crisis and therefore amnesia and no hallucinations.

It is impossible to rigidly apply these categories to the different forms of trances or phenomena of possession. We must bear in mind that both trance and ecstasy can be found during shamanic seances, for example, to return to the subject of the Chepang, when the *pande* moves from a state of trance to one of catalepsy, which definitely fits many of the aspects used by Rouget to describe the state of ecstasy.

In contrast to what happens in many other geographical parts of the world and in Siberian Shamanism, Nepali shamans do not use any forms of drugs or stimulatory substances to facilitate entry into an altered state of consciousness, which is probably controlled by breathing techniques and helped along by the rhythmic beating of the drum.

Any expert *pande* must have perfect control over his state of trance, from which he must be able to enter and exit at will, which further distinguishes the figure of the shaman from that of the possessed. The *pande* and *jhakri* usually dictate the terms and duration of their relationships to the supernatural by both welcoming divinities and spirits into their body and travelling to celestial and Underworld kingdoms in person and not as a divinity who has been temporarily incarnated into human form. Contrary to the possessed, the shaman has access to and in a way uses the trance in his quality of a mere mortal, even when no supernatural being is being hosted in his body.

There are several distinctions in the shamanic trance which do not apply so much to the form or external and physical manifestations of the trance which remain much the same, but rather apply to the different significances of the various forms of trance.

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<sup>69</sup> De Heusch, L. 1971. *Possession et chamanisme* (1964) e *La folie des dieux et la raison des hommes. Pourquoi l'épouser ? Et autres essais*. Paris: Gallimard.

<sup>70</sup> Rouget, G. 1980. *La musique et la transe*. Paris: Gallimard.

The first and perhaps most important is that of the trance which I shall define as an extrasensory or incorporatory trance. During this form of trance the shaman becomes a sort of vehicle which allows the divinities and spirits and sometimes, though this is a rare occurrence, the spirits of the deceased to come down or up to or leave the Earth and talk to people through him. The second is a trance involving movement which allows the soul of the shaman to take a magic flight to the Underworld, Heavens or anywhere in the world of humans, if, for example, he is searching for someone who has disappeared or has got lost in some particularly inaccessible place.

In the first case, the soul of the shaman co-exists in his body with a supernatural being which is addressing itself to mankind for some reason and therefore everything must take place in the land of humans. In the second case, the soul leaves the body on the Earth to travel to other cosmic levels in the form of a human soul, perhaps helped by the guiding spirits, but without hosting any supernatural beings. In the first case, it is the divinity who comes to the land of humans by means of the shaman, while in the second case it is the man who, in the figure of the shaman, visits the world of the divinities.

In both cases, though there are some differences, the trance takes the form of a journey. In the case of the trance involving incorporation, this evidently represents the arrival of a supernatural being who would normally inhabit other places, whereas in the case of the trance involving movement, it transmutes itself into a sort of vehicle which is used to transport the soul of the shaman.

The passage from an incorporatory trance to a trance involving movement and viceversa can be quite sudden though there may be a slight pause in between, depending on the circumstances and according to the different *modus operandi* of the shaman in question.

At times this passage is easily recognisable in Chepang *pande*, who often go into a fairly long silent trance between the two phases which is not accompanied by chants or invocations and is recognised by those present as the moment in which the *pande* is leaving the Earth for various cosmic lands. It is this very transfer, before the shaman reaches the Heavens or Underworld, which functions as a liminal phase between two different states - one connected to the divinities and the other to humans - which requires silence, and is often accompanied by the *pande* closing his eyelids and therefore isolating himself from the outside world. It usually lasts only a matter of minutes, if not instants but obviously corresponds to a different time for the shamans.

Investigation into this different concept and into the particular sensation of time in period of trance would be quite interesting though probably difficult to carry out. I believe there must be a link between this and dream time, which trances are very often compared to by the Chepang shamans for whom all initiation takes place in dreams in the presence of spiritual gurus, and for whom dreams play an important role in their profession of shaman. In dream phases of only a few minutes, very long and complicated dreams can take place which the person who is sleeping at the time believes on waking up to have lasted for hours.

Descriptions of cosmic travel and magic flights given by the shamans are long and complicated and yet could have taken place in only a few instants of trance.

As we have already mentioned, the Chepang *pande* are considered by many other ethnic groups in Nepal to be one of the most powerful in the country, mainly because of the particular characteristics of their form of Shamanism which is usually though not solely directed at the Underworld.

To avoid any dangerous misunderstandings we must make the distinction between chthonious Shamanism, which is that practised by the Chepang, and the form of

Shamanism known as black Shamanism which is linked to the world of sorcery. The dividing line between white and black shamans is in some cases quite difficult to define and we must beware of trying to separate elements of witchcraft from the religious context.

Éveline Lot-Falck described the oath taken by the Yakut shamans who had to consecrate their presence in the cult to the dark forces, so as to neutralise them in order to offer more protection to men and in order to prevent an abuse of power<sup>71</sup>. Obviously the shamans with these characteristics are often accused of witchcraft because of this, but they are the only ones who can communicate with black supernaturals. The French scholar then points out that some groups make a clear distinction between black and white shamans while others do not and these only have one shaman who covers all the functions. In any case the battle between the soul of one shaman and another which takes place in the form of their animal doubles is reported by Lot-Falck as being part of black Shamanism and is never practised by white shamans.

The Chepang make no distinction between black and white *pande* and all shamanic functions are carried out by one person, though there is often more than one *pande* in a Chepang village, without there being any diversification in the roles or competences of each individual. It is the *pande* who must work for the good of the community and practically all of them consider themselves to be white though it is very difficult to draw a line between black and white Shamanism.

Proof of this can be seen in that, contrary to what Lot-Falck says about the different Siberian groups, it is not uncommon for battles to take place between white shamans: all the shamans have confirmed that on their travels to the Heavens or to the Underworld, it is quite possible to meet the soul of another *pande* on the same path. In this case it is usually the less powerful *pande* who must move off quickly and allow the other *pande* to pass, but if this does not happen, confrontation and battle with the use of magical weapons cannot be avoided and one of the *pande* often becomes seriously ill or even dies because of this.

Similar episodes can happen because of jealousy. Let us look at the accounts given to me by two *pande*, one of whom was a man, Narcing Praja, and the other a woman<sup>72</sup>, Krishora Devi Praja, both from the district of Makwanpur. This is what Krishora had to say:

‘Once I was called to go and visit a sick child who was quite far from my village. When I arrived I met another *jhakri*. While I was taking the child’s pulse, I said to the other shaman that this child could not possibly live and asked him what he thought. He replied, ‘Though I was a woman and he was a man, I accepted the challenge and told him you can send me an arrow<sup>73</sup> and destroy me, my breast is open and I will have to eat your excrement. If you can defeat me, you can kill me; but if you cannot, then you will die! The man then said, . I replied, «My home is far away, if you must do something, do it here. If I have to sully myself with a blow, though I do not want to, I will do so, only this once. It is not the same, like when someone offers you food after you have eaten and you take another serving: I shall do this only once.» The man became very angry and left the dwelling: I knew that he would send me an arrow that same day. He was one of those shamans who use their profession and knowledge to their advantage within the village: these *jhakri* go to visit patients in their homes, but instead of curing

<sup>71</sup> Lot Falck, É. 1973. Le Chamanisme en Sibérie: Essai de Mise en Point. *Chamanisme et Possession, Asie du Sud-Est et Monde insulindien, Bulletin de Documentation et de Recherche*IV (3). Paris-La Haye.

<sup>72</sup> None of the previous studies on the Chepang ever acknowledged the presence of shamanesses. On many of my expeditions, I met some of these, but we shall discuss this in a later section on the particularities of female Shamanism.

<sup>73</sup> Not a real arrow but an invisible magic one.

them, they pronounce magic formulas and make offerings of rice and chicken to make the situation worse. That is why the parents of the sick child had called for me. Before I arrived, the man had asked the parents of the child to sacrifice a goat and a chicken, but, when I arrived, I told them it would be pointless because there was no life left in the child. After having eaten and without taking a second helping, I too left the dwelling and went to sleep in another house in the same village. My daughter Bashanti was with me: she was a little child then. Probably when I was sleeping without the covers, the shaman began to say his formulas. I began to dream and I saw the shaman who was ordering his power to bring down all sorts of ills upon me. In the dream, I was followed by many things: I ran and went to hide in a temple dedicated to a local deity. I put my soul in the hands of this god and suddenly saw a stone that was following me. The stone did not manage to hit me: the *jhakri* then threw three branches from the *sal* tree (*Shorea robusta*) at me. But I was able to break both the stone and the branches into little pieces. After this the man had nothing else to throw at me: he did not have the knowledge or sufficient power to throw anything else. I then threw these things back at him and they struck him in the chest. The morning after that I woke up and returned home: a week later, I heard that the other *jhakri* was dead.’

Fights can also take place between a shaman and other religious officials, mainly Hindu, as we can see from Narcing Praja’s account:

‘A few months ago, I went to Birganj to treat a relation of mine. I was just about to carry out a *puja* when an Indian hermit arrived, a *yoghin*, and asked me, . I explained that I was there to treat one of my relations and he asked, I replied negatively to his questions but he continued, I replied, . The *yoghin* asked me how much power I had and I asked him the same question. The hermit said, . He then set seven porcupine prickles on the ground before me and told me to start my *puja*, but I said that he should start first so as to prove his knowledge. We were talking when I saw the seven prickles had begun to tremble, because of the power of the hermit, and, suddenly, I heard a whooshing sound go past me: it was one of the prickles. I immediately stood up, and the *yoghin* attacked me again: I heard the sound of a *lota* <sup>74</sup> coming towards me and I sent it off into the distance. I then turned the *lota* round, using my formulae: but I did not want to hit the *yoghin*, I just wanted to stop him and protect myself at the same time. The hermit left the house we were in and that night I had a high fever. I decided not to send my magic arrows: if I had done so one of us would have died.’

Similar accounts make it clear that the *pande* have the potential to cause harm to others: it is up to each individual which way he chooses to follow and there is no clear dividing line between the two ways even in the minds of the Chepang themselves.

I should like to use an illustrative example here of the encounter which I had in 1994 with Dam Bahadur in one of the remotest areas in the district of Chitwan. I had gone to this area to meet other Chepang groups and of course to talk to the *pande*. This was not at all a simple matter as the Chepang who live further away are very shy and besides this, the situation was worsened by the striking poverty which was the result of the devastating monsoon season which had just passed. Of the various encounters I had in the following days, one struck me because of its particularity. The inhabitants of a village I had stopped in spoke with great reverence of what was considered to be the most powerful *pande* in the area, who was, however, described in somewhat ambiguous terms. On the one hand, everyone agreed that he possessed great knowledge indeed and had great powers, on the other hand they said that he lived with his family, isolated from the two villages close to him. Dam Bahadur had been accused of having made one of the girls of the village I was in seriously ill and he had actually been badly beaten by the men of the community. In spite of this, everyone believed Dam Bahadur to be the only *pande* in the region who could solve particularly complicated and dangerous cases.

<sup>74</sup> The term *lota* is used to describe a typical small Nepalese vase, used for water and made of brass or aluminium (T562a).

Dam Bahadur himself was in fact an ambiguous character though without doubt very powerful as one *pande*, a youngster I had known for years and whose shamanic vocation I had followed from the moment the vocation had been revealed to him and who I had decided to add to my following of bearers, had occasion to note.

During discussions, Dam Bahadur spoke quite openly about his knowledge, and was proud of his powers and revealed an event which had happened a few months before when the inhabitants of the nearest village to him decided to call in another shaman from another village to celebrate an important ceremony at the altar of a local deity.

Right in the middle of the *puja* celebrations a tiger appeared which attacked and killed many of the domestic animals. Dam Bahadur said that the people then understood that he should have been the one to hold the ceremony and from that moment onwards he began to command more respect.

The *pande* did not confirm that he had been responsible for the tiger's appearance, but at another point in our discussion, in reply to a question of mine about if he knew any *pande* who could change into animals, he took great pleasure in saying that, though he was not able to change himself into an animal, he could use a particular ceremony to call a dangerous tiger to the altar of the goddess we had mentioned previously. He confirmed with pride that the tiger was nothing but one of the goddess' mounts, and that there were very few people who could do this.

The conclusions are obvious: whatever had happened during the ceremony in honour of the goddess which had been celebrated by another *pande*, it is clear that the inhabitants of the village, and Dam Bahadur himself, had connected the appearance of the tiger who had killed the precious domestic animals to the *pande*.

After this had happened, respect and fear for Dam Bahadur grew, a sign that certain characteristics which are certainly not white in the Shamanism practised by some *pande* can also show the power and supposedly greater ability of the shaman himself, who can exercise control over a vast area, even over malefic beings. It must be said that cases like that of Dam Bahadur are extremely rare and that most *pande* we encountered admitted that they could control both malefic and benefic beings but that it would be a grave misuse to use these for personal reasons.

Moreover, although the *pande* can communicate with and relate to the Underworld, we must not make the mistake of considering this to be a negative place or entirely occupied by malefic beings.

The Chepang see Heaven as being the source of many problems, as this is the cosmic place in which the lord of death, Yama raja, resides and he has several dangerous planets at his service which he himself sends to man to induce illness and death.

On the other hand, the *patal* or Underworld is described as a place where the most important divinities which belong to the Chepang people live and it is often referred to as the land where the most worthy ancestors reside as they have been granted permission to live together with the gods. Some of the myths about the origins of the Chepang tell of how the group was born from the Underworld, in particular from the stones and Earth in the *patal*.

This privileged relationship with the Underworld is what distinguishes the Chepang shamans from those of other ethnic groups, so much so that there are two words in Chepang to describe their *pande* and the other *jhakri* in the country. They call themselves and everyone who belongs to their group, be they shamans or not, *tunsuriban* while shamans belonging to other groups, in particular those of the Tamang, are called *urghsuriban*.

Between the Chepang and Tamang *jhakri* there is a continuous comparison which is mainly due to the fact that the Tamang is the group the Chepang have most contact with. In Chepang *tunsuriban* describes those who can access both Heavens and the Underworld while *urghsuriban* describes those who can only ascend to the Heavens and who would die if they were to venture into the Underworld.

Alongside its principally chthonious character, there is another point which distinguishes Chepang Shamanism from that present in the rest of the country. This is the importance given to dreams and the fact that the whole learning process of the shamanic profession takes place during dreams in which the guru spirits explain to the novice what he has to do in order to become an expert *pande*. After he has had these dreams, the individual chosen to become a *pande* may even decide to do an apprenticeship with an experienced *pande*, but this happens very rarely and most Chepang *pande* have no form of earthly training.

As dreams are closely linked to the calling of the spirits and initiation, I should like to examine this matter in greater detail.

### **The calling to the profession by the spirits and the importance of dreams**

Not just anyone can become a shaman; they must be called to the profession by the spirits, during which time and after which the novice shaman is instructed how to procede.

In the context of Siberia and North East Asia, Mircea Eliade has noted four main means of recruiting shamans; by inheritance; spontaneous, which implies the or ; the personal desire on the behalf of an individual (for example, as with the Altaics); and election of a potential shaman by the clan, as is the case with the Tungus<sup>75</sup>. The first two cases, which are far more frequent, can also be found in Nepal, though we have no knowledge of the existence of the remaining two forms of recruitment in the small kingdom. Eliade also notes that those shamans who have voluntarily chosen or been chosen by the clan to practise the profession are generally considered to be less powerful than those who have been called by the spirits or those who have inherited the profession.

Inheritance and the calling by the spirits to the profession are often both present and necessary to one another. In many parts of the world, there is a common pattern to acquiring the powers of a shaman. The candidate usually begins to receive messages from the spirits and the divinities when still adolescent, these may take the form of uncontrollable trembling; agitation and excitement often described as being bouts of madness; various forms of illnesses and consequently pains throughout the body. The novice feels the need to seek the isolation of the jungles or forests; he becomes aggressive towards other men; speaks uncontrollably and has frequent dreams when the assistant spirits or divinities appear to him. During this phase, which could last a few days or even years, the future shaman is often kidnapped by supernatural beings who have the duty to instruct the novice in the procedures required to practise the profession.

This supernatural instruction can then be followed by earthly instruction during which the novice, for varying periods of time, learns the chants, music, myths and any

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<sup>75</sup> Eliade, M. 1951, op.cit., p.31. For a detailed description of the procedures followed by individuals wanting to become shamans in the case of the Tungus, see Shirokogoroff, S. M., 1935. *Psychomental Complex of the Tungus*. London: Kegan and Paul, Trench, Truber and Co. for material regarding the Altaics, see Mikhailowski, V. M. 1984. Shamanism in Siberia and European Russia. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute XXIV*.London.

other necessary aid for the practising of the profession of the shaman from a more experienced shaman.

In Nepal, as in Central Northern India<sup>76</sup>, the supernatural call is present in many ethnic groups and is often accompanied by inheritance of the profession. This is the case with the Sherpas, as described by Robert Paul:

‘Shamans have their calling announced to them, usually in their early or middle teens, by a bout of craziness which may last anywhere from a few weeks to two years. In this craziness, the divine manifests itself to them, but in so chaotic and overpowering a way that they are overcome and go mad.....Gradually, the uncontrolled craziness organizes itself, and the shaman’s tutelary god makes his identity known and instructs him in the techniques of shamanizing. The shaman receives no other instruction except that from his tutelary god.....’<sup>77</sup>

The same applies to the Thulung Rai:

‘The initiative in the recruitment of a *jhakri* is ascribed not to humans, but to a god who selects or favours some individual, typically by possessing him in the course of a seance.’<sup>78</sup>

The same points can be applied to many other ethnic groups in the country, amongst which the Magar as described by Micheal Oppitz<sup>79</sup> and Anne de Sales<sup>80</sup>, the Tamang as described by Andras Höfer<sup>81</sup>, Brigitte Steinmann<sup>82</sup>, and David H. Holmberg who, when referring to the calling to the profession by the spirits, which in this case corresponds to a violent attack by defunct shaman forefathers (*lente*) on an individual they have chosen for the profession, writes that:

‘Assaults by *lente* are followed by unusual behaviour. Seizure often occurs suddenly, as it did toward the end of my stay in Tamdangsa, when a young man ate coals and danced with a red-hot fire-grate over his head while a *bombo*<sup>83</sup> was sounding ..... Those grasped by *lente* report fits of uncontrollable shuddering, long periods of dissociation, and severe illness. One *bombo* recalled dying and his kin preparing a cremation shroud. His breath returned and he eventually recovered after months of extreme bouts of violent shaking. The only ritual means of alleviating these prolonged assaults is to become a *bombo* and to honor *lente* regularly.’<sup>84</sup>

In many ethnic groups in Nepal, the vocation usually manifests itself in a violent manner in the form of physical and mental crises which, though they do not always correspond to serious illnesses, still feel like such. The calling up to the profession

<sup>76</sup> In particular the Savara, Bondo, Birhor, Baiga and Khond groups as reported by Rahmann, R.1959, op.cit., p.730.

<sup>77</sup> Paul, R. A. 1976. Some Observations on Sherpa Shamanism. Hitchcock, J. T. and Jones, R. L.(eds.). *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd: pp. 144-145.

<sup>78</sup> Allen, N. 1976. Shamanism among the Thulung Rai. Hitchcock, J. T. and Jones, R. L., op. cit., p.126.

<sup>79</sup> Oppitz, M. 1981, op. cit.

<sup>80</sup> De Sales, A. 1991, op. cit.

<sup>81</sup> Höfer, A. 1985. Tamang ritual texts I. Notes on the interpretation of an oral tradition of Nepal. *Journal of Royal Asiatic Society* 1: pp.23-28.

Höfer, A. 1994. *A Recitation of the Tamang Shaman in Nepal*. Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.

<sup>82</sup> Steinmann, B. 1987. *Les Tamangs du Népal - Usages et religion, religion de l’usage*. Paris: Editions Recherche sur les Civilisations.

<sup>83</sup> The Tamang for shaman.

<sup>84</sup> Holmberg, D. H. 1989. *Order in Paradox, Myth, ritual and exchange among Nepal’s Tamang*. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press: p.147.

generally brings on both physical and psychical suffering and is usually seen as a frightening and dangerous experience.

In the different categories of shamans present in the Limbu, the distinction between two types of ecstatic functionaries is made<sup>85</sup>: the *thapmura* or those who have received a calling up which has not been too violent, and the *muke*, who have had a particularly traumatic calling up by the spirits. The former are not considered to be powerful shamans, while the latter who have had grave illnesses, sudden, violent and uncontrolled trances and periods of loss of consciousness during the course of their vocation, become extremely powerful and greatly respected shamans. There is an interesting account of an initiatory crisis undergone by a young person who was then to become a *muke* type *phendagma*<sup>86</sup>:

‘In the months that followed, he could no longer tolerate anyone. He always wanted to be alone. He terrorized his whole household, his mother, father, sisters all fled from the house. When he was alone, he offered incense to Yuma. Once for a period of two weeks he forbade everyone from entering the house. His relatives moved into a neighbour’s house. They sent him a *phendagma*. From the yard the *phendagma* shouted: he howled. And this time he sent him away. During this time, he had terribly violent trances. Later, when he had become a *phendagma*, the trances became less violent. Now that he is old, they have disappeared.’<sup>87</sup>

The calling to the profession by supernatural spirits within the Chepang is not usually traumatic and takes place during a series of dreams, during which the tutelary spirit and divinities instruct the future *pande* in the practises and secrets of a shaman. Dreams take on much greater importance in the Chepang than other groups, as the *pande* Krishora replied when asked why the *pande* are considered the most important *jhakri* in Nepal:

‘We (*pande*) possess an ancient power and everyone turns to us. We (*pande*) do not have any guru (humans) and are instructed how to become *pande* in dreams, these dreams teach us how to cure illnesses. Many people come to us after they have been to a *jhakri* (from another ethnic group) who has not been able to cure them. The other *jhakri* do not have the power to call upon both the gods in the *patal* as well as those of the *akas*<sup>88</sup>. This is why they cannot cure all illnesses.’<sup>89</sup>

Another old *pande* also explained that:

‘Everything was created by the *patal*....the Brahmins read as much as they should from their scriptures: we do not. There are one thousand six hundred spirits<sup>90</sup>: those which live in the water cannot be seen directly but appear in dreams, riding something I cannot describe, no-one else can have these dreams. Only a *pande* can have this sort of dream, because only he knows how to play with these things. I am a simple person, I lead a simple life, but I can call on the divinities of the Brahmin or other *jhakri* (of Nepal). I can call on them and put them in the right place, and this is why we are called *pande*.’<sup>91</sup>

<sup>85</sup> Sagant, P. 1976. Becoming a Limbu priest. Ethnographic Notes. Hitchcock, J. T., and Jones, R. L., op. cit., p.66.

<sup>86</sup> The Limbu have several different types of religious experts; one of these is the *phendagma*, who could be said to have the greatest number of shamanic attributes.

<sup>87</sup> Sagant, P. 1976, op. cit., p.68.

<sup>88</sup> *Akas* (T3a) means the Heavens in Hindi and Nepali.

<sup>89</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja and Hare Bahadur Praja, Makwanpur District, 08:12:1992.

<sup>90</sup> The *pande* is talking about his tutelary spirits here.

<sup>91</sup> From an interview with Krisna Bahadur Praja, Dhading District, 12:11:1991.

The *pande* in particular have no terrestrial instruction, in that they believe that anyone who needs instruction from humans cannot possibly have been chosen by the gods, and therefore will not be respected: inclination and personal will are apparently not taken into any consideration and the only calling which is recognised as valid is that of the spiritual initiation.

The importance of initiatory dreams sent by spiritual guru and the fact that the *pande* can venture into the kingdom of the Underworld is recognised by everyone in Nepal as being one of the principal characteristics which make the Chepang *pande* the most powerful *pande* in Nepal.

In those extremely rare cases when the guru corresponds to and is recognised by the novice in a real person, this must have been revealed to the novice in a dream. During an interview with the shamaness Krishora Devi Praja and her nephew Jaman, novice *pande*, the latter said that he had had seven dreams in the space of a week, during which a male divinity and a female divinity had contacted him and begun to teach him the first *mantra* (T492b). At the same time as these two spiritual guru, Jaman also received some instruction from his aunt, who said:

'I am his guru; I teach him things in dreams and I make my divinity ride him. During the dreams I am not in the same room as him: when Jaman is dreaming, I can be at my home and it is my mind which goes to seek him out. If he needs me during the dreams, I help him in a way which is not visible.'<sup>92</sup>

This situation is indeed somewhat peculiar. First of all it is extremely rare to find women shamans who can initiate men. At this point let us mention A. W. Macdonald<sup>93</sup> and his long and interesting account of the vocation of Gobind Prasad, a Muglan shaman, who refers that the latter had been instructed by a shamaness when the profession had manifested itself to him.

The form of instruction is also somewhat peculiar in that, though it had mainly been given by a human being, it took the form of dreams for the novice shaman.

No merely terrestrial instruction would be accepted given that knowledge must have been obtained at times when the candidate has distanced himself from his everyday life as is the case with the dream when communications can take place between men and supernatural beings.

For the Chepang in general, time spent in dreams and time spent awake is not clearly divided and in a certain sense dream time is considered to be a which can access worlds and situations which it would be impossible to communicate with when one was normally awake. The dream itself is a door which is used by both men and the *pande* in particular to contact divinities and assistant spirits and by the latter two to communicate with the land of the humans. There must be a link between the trance and the dream, when both facilitate communication between two worlds, the one human and the other supernatural. Anyone can have dreams but the trance is an obviously shamanic trait. In the calling up to the shamanic profession by supernatural beings, one could see further links between the two forms, given that the dream, through the instruction given to the novice, is a sort of preparatory phase to the trance itself which one day the young *pande* will have to master.

I should like to note some interesting descriptions of the types of dreams and visions experienced by Chepang *pande*:

<sup>92</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja and Jaman Sina Praja, Makwanpur District, 18:02:1991.

<sup>93</sup> Macdonald, A. W. 1976. Preliminary notes on some *jhakri* of the Muglan. Hitchcock, J. T., and Jones, R. L., op. cit.: pp.309 - 341.

‘I became a *pande* through dreams. I became a *pande* after a dream I had during which I was ordered to cure people, do this or that task. I heard a sound in the dream, like a voice, saying . I asked it, But she replied «I am also the goddess of the Heavens, if anyone has problems, if you should need me, call and I will run to your aid. Just call me goddess. In the dream I also saw the *ban-jhakri* <sup>94</sup> with his long uncombed hair who said to me, you should need me, just call. I am here to help you. I then asked the goddess, . And she replied, . During the dream, I couldn’t see anyone, only hear their voices. This goddess is the goddess of the Earth when she is on the Earth, of the Sky when she is in Heaven and of the Underworld when she is in the Underworld.. But it is always the same one and whenever I hold a *puja*, it is always she who comes to my aid.»<sup>95</sup>

The spiritual guru which initiate the *pande* vary from person to person, as we see in various accounts reported below: in general these are divine beings who manifest themselves in various forms, though it is often the case that *pande* forefathers belonging to the same line as the novice or to the same clan appear to the novice and have the task of passing on their knowledge to their relative:

‘In the Chepang you can only become a *pande* through dreams. I myself became a *pande* through dreams. There are no human guru in the Chepang. My guru, who still help me even today during the *pujas*, are the sun and the moon.’<sup>96</sup>

‘The figures I see in the dreams sometimes appear in the form of gods and goddesses, other times they take on human or animal form. I have to obey the orders they give me in the dreams. They order me to do some task and if I do it, I discover that it is to my advantage.’<sup>97</sup>

‘During the dreams, a man arrived in the form of a human being. I didn’t know his face. He ordered me to show him respect. I didn’t believe him at first and thought it was a normal dream. But the man continued to come into other dreams after that and so I began to do as he asked. Later I understood that he was my guru, someone I didn’t know, I couldn’t see every day. During the first dream, you feel as if you are trembling, beating the drum, singing. These are only feelings though they never actually happen: when you wake up you remember everything. Even today the dreams sometimes come to me, when I have to celebrate a important *puja*. Without dreams there is no power, no strength. Sometimes the dreams are the same as the ones I saw at the beginning: for example, the guru comes and orders me to pay respect to him. My guru is an old *pande* forefather.’<sup>98</sup>

‘I used my first drum when I was twenty-two. The knowledge I received was given to me through dreams by one of my clan forefathers. It was my grandfather: my father was also a *pande*, but his father was much more powerful and celebrated *puja* throughout the whole area. It was my destiny to become a *pande*. At the beginning I went mad, I had to become a *pande*. At the age of fifteen, I had my first dream, at the age of eighteen I went mad and at twenty-two I entered the profession. My guru was my grandfather who passed on all the knowledge. My grandfather died when I was very small and I cannot recall his face. In the dreams I saw my grandfather’s forefathers and the divinities who always took on the form of children. In the dream it was explained to me that the divinities belonged to my clan.’<sup>99</sup>

‘All my knowledge was given to me in a dream. In the dream I saw a person who, clapping his hands, said, . He explained how I was to call him, what I would have to do and what he would do. When he had finished, he gave me a drum. All this happened in the dream which I had at the age of

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<sup>94</sup> Literally speaking, this means ‘shaman of the forest’, a very important figure in Nepal who I shall refer to in more detail later on.

<sup>95</sup> From an interview with Bim Bahadur Praja, Makwanpur District, 21:04:1995.

<sup>96</sup> From an interview with Buddhi Bahadur Praja, Makwanpur District, 13:09:1994.

<sup>97</sup> From an interview with Jaman Sina Praja, Makwanpur District, 18:02:1991.

<sup>98</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja, Makwanpur District, 04:03:1994.

<sup>99</sup> From an interview with Barnasin Praja, Chitwan District, 20:04:1995.

eighteen. The drum began to roll down a hill and I had to run after it. If I was able to catch it, I would be fit to become a *pande*, otherwise I would not. (While running after the drum) I was trembling<sup>100</sup>. Some people become *pande* the day after the dream, but many wait for the Chhonam Festival, in the month of Bhado, to start practising.<sup>101</sup>

The Chhonam Festival, which will be discussed in a later chapter, is the most important Chepang festival. On the first night of the full moon in the month of Bhado, which corresponds to the period between mid August and mid September, the fruits of the new harvest are offered by the *pande* to the forefathers and the divinities. The whole community goes to a shaman's house and it is in fact before the whole community that the young *pande* beat their drums in public for the first time. They may have been called up some time previous to this occasion but the supernaturals' choice must in some way be recognised by the community and the new shamans only begin their mainly therapeutic activities after this recognition.

During Chhonam, the more expert *pande* often give advice and protect the novices from any possible attack from any supernatural beings. In the course of this ceremony the young shamans never take part in the therapeutic activities which are asked of the older shamans, though they obviously have the ability to do so.

In the middle of Chhonam festivities and before starting to cure various patients or offer sacrifices, a more experienced shaman will usually ask a younger shaman to take the drum and demonstrate his skill in public. In some cases, the novice sits cross-legged between two expert shamans who have the task of protecting his back and chest from attacks by malefic beings or divinities or even ancestral spirits who - it is believed - may, for one reason or another, not appreciate the new presence.

The *pande* then begin to beat the drum and chant the first invocations. At this stage the whole community expresses judgement on his knowledge and ability in the form of serious reflections as well as lighthearted ones which cause great hilarity among the people attending the ceremony. The laughter and loud comments accompany the first activities of the *pande* but usually stop when they go into trance for the first time. Then and only then does the community recognise the divinities and the spirits who will guide the activities of the new shaman in the future and their manifestation is taken by all to mean the final consecration of the *pande*, who, from then on, is actually recognised and respected as such.

As we have already mentioned, the expert *pande* frequently take on the role of an earthly guru often only during this festivity for the new shamans who are called *cela* (T183 a), or disciples.

Before putting on the ritual necklaces and beating the drums the *cela* bend their heads to touch the feet of the *pande* as a form of respect, and their first chant is usually dedicated to greeting and asking for help from the latter:

*'I am dependent on your favour, o guru<sup>102</sup>*  
*I could be attacked by witches,*  
*I could be captured by them,*  
*anyone could attack me,*  
*guru, protect me !!!*  
*Give me rest, take these dangers away from me !!!*  
*I enter into the faith of the guru !*

<sup>100</sup> The *pande* uses the term *kamnu* which means tremble, in this case typical of the trance. (T88a).

<sup>101</sup> From an interview with Dam Bahadur Praja, Dhading District, 09:03:1994.

<sup>102</sup> In this case the young *pande* turns to the expert shamans, addressing them as guru, as a form of respect.

*I speak in the faith of the guru !  
I cannot take any name so far away !  
I am under your feet! ‘*

The novice then goes on to chant invocations to the divinities, usually already known to everyone present and in any case with few variations to those chanted previously by other *pande*, who often correct the *cela*, or urge them to raise their voice and prompt the difficult passages, often accompanying the chant themselves.

It is at this point that the collective hilarity usually breaks out, helped along by the expert *pande* who alternate their teaching with wise comments and jokes directed at the new *pande*. They also recount tales of their activities or memories of their own initiation or those of other *cela* which have taken place during the past. This activity, as the *pande* themselves often confirm, is also a way to test the ability of the young shamans to concentrate and isolate themselves completely from the surrounding environment. If the novice should be distracted by earthly conversations and not be able to concentrate, the divinities would not enter him and this would be the result of grave error and incomplete knowledge which would not allow them to practise the profession of shaman in full.

Actually, the hilarity also relieves the tension of a situation which is extremely dangerous for all those present. Before the new *pande* has been able to show the community his knowledge of the world of the spirits and his ability to dominate it, critically serious situations could arise among those gathered there. If the *cela* should not be in a position to control the supernaturals he has called on, it is common belief that these spirits could, annoyed at having been disturbed for nothing, turn against any one individual or even the whole group and send epidemics or famine to the village.

In the course of the last Chhonam which I was able to attend in September 1994, during a particularly violent and uncontrolled trance of a none too skilled *cela*, a man sitting smoking amongst the crowd was taken by a fit of sudden trembling. In the space of a few seconds, the man, completely transfigured, groaning and making animal sounds, stood up and had to be immobilized by two *pande* who quickly took control of the situation, making the man come out of his state of trance which he had fallen into all of a sudden. The onlookers, who had been terrified at the possession of the man, then burst out into raucous laughter as soon as the situation had returned to normal, laughing at and imitating the situation in which their companion had found himself and after a few minutes of stupor due to his lack of recollection of what had happened, the latter also joined in the collective laughter.

This was later explained to me by the old *pande* who was the owner of the house where the festivities had taken place. The *cela* had called upon the ancestral spirit of another clan who had then attacked those present in anger and could easily have caused the death of someone if the older shamans present had not taken the situation into hand.

The young *pande* are not always powerful and able: some of them, like for example, the one described above, are not recognised by the community or by the expert *pande* as fully ‘formed’ shamans.

It is believed that novices who are thought to be less capable have not yet received complete knowledge from their spiritual *guru*. In these cases, the new *pande* do not usually enter the profession and wait for new initiatory dreams after which they will present themselves again at the next Chhonam Festival.

I have met *pande* who have presented themselves to the public four times running without any progress being noted.

In fact, despite these descriptions, it is a fairly rare occurrence for an inexperienced or not very capable *pande* to gain ulterior knowledge in his lifetime: shamanic knowledge and initiatory secrets are transmitted by the divinities and assistant spirits as a complete and finished product. It is in fact possible to become a powerful *pande* in the course of one night during which instruction is passed on in one dream alone.

This knowledge has nothing to do with the willingness of the individual to learn as it is transmitted over periods of time which vary in length through dreams which follow a precise and predefined programme and which are understood to be dependent on a superior being.

In fact the activity of the *pande* is in part also conditioned by a certain fatalism which is perhaps connected to the concepts and foundations of Hinduism.

The Chepang, like many other groups, believe that some days after the birth of a child, a goddess called Kali-Ama, or black mother, or even Babi-Ama, visits the newborn child in its cradle and writes its destiny on the inside of its forehead. The child's destiny will remain with it all its life, be it short or long. It is believed that any event which takes place in the life of a human, including their death, has already been decided at the moment of birth by an unchanging and inscrutable divine will.

The act of becoming a *pande* is also predetermined, as is the amount of knowledge given to each shaman.

Once the calling up by the divinities has presented itself in more or less traumatic form, the novice then waits for the dreams and the knowledge to be given him, apparently without being guided by a desire to learn more as this does not depend on human will. The calling up is always accepted and when instruction is interrupted or refused for some reason, this causes serious psycho-physiological disturbance which will remain with the individual for the rest of his or her life.

Let us examine two of these cases here: the first is of a woman - Sancha Maya, now fairly old, who spent her whole life fighting the calling up to the profession by the divinities. The second case describes a man who was seriously psychically disturbed when his relatives prevented him from becoming a fully fledged *pande* and interrupted his instruction in a traumatic fashion.

Before we examine the case of Sancha Maya, let us examine the matter of female Shamanism within the Chepang.

As I have already mentioned, the few scholars who have studied this ethnic group have refuted the existence of female shamanesses, who do actually exist and are accorded as much respect as male shamans, though there are not as many shamanesses as shamans.

In the course of my research, I encountered five female *pande* and was informed of the existence of at least a further two. In each case, female Shamanism presented the same prerogatives and functions as male Shamanism though women are not allowed to carry out animal sacrifices and therefore require the services of an assistant or another male *pande*<sup>103</sup>.

It must be said that women are not allowed to kill animals in general, not even for the purpose of preparing food and it is always the man who does this. This ban on making animal sacrifices is therefore not a shamanic regulation but stems from common everyday usage.

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<sup>103</sup> Female Shamanism and male Shamanism in the Chepang is exactly the same and therefore I did not go further into distinguishing between the two.

The fact that there are fewer shamanesses can be explained by the fact that women, who are involved from when they are adolescents in hard agricultural labour, continuous pregnancies and the search for fruit and wild roots in the jungle during the dry season, are psychologically less inclined to welcome a calling up by the supernatural spirits which would undoubtedly lead to a profession just as tiring, and, as great part of the profession is practised at night, would find it difficult to reconcile the profession with their daily chores.

This leads to a tendency on their behalf to withdraw from the calling up by the spirits, as was the case with the oldest female *pande* I met who, now almost blind and deaf and about seventy years old, only became a *pande* a few years ago, though she had received her first dream at the age of five, as she had been too involved with family commitments and many pregnancies:

'I had dreams. In one of them I was given a bronze drum and a turban. In my dream my father was my guru. I had this dream at the age of five: at that time no-one in my family was still alive, my parents were already dead. In the dream I flew from Birganj to here and from here to Birganj. Now I can no longer see and hardly hear: once an insect went into my ear and from then on I have never been able to hear well. I had this dream when I was a child, but for a long time I could not dedicate myself to the profession. I only became a *pande* twelve or fifteen years ago.'<sup>104</sup>

Let us now look at the case of Sancha Maya:

'My grandmother was a *pande*, but I never met her though I do remember my brother who was also a *pande*. After my brother died, I began to feel unwell and no *pande* was able to find the cause of this. At the beginning I did not know how to cure myself and gradually time went by: one day, all of a sudden, I saw a dream where told me to become a *pande*. We had a conversation and talked directly to one another and I refused to become a *pande*, explaining that I had children to bring up. In the dream the relationship between my grandmother and the other members of my family were explained to me and I was told to take up the same profession. In the dream I was told that I would at least have to cure people by using rice. But I refused and three or four years went by during which I did not celebrate any *puja*. In the meantime, nothing happened to me, I was peaceful and never had to spend anything on cures or call in a *pande*, as I was in good health. When I was young I did not want to become a *pande* and now I do not want to because I am getting old. But now and again, once a year, during the Chhonam festivities or on the nights when the moon is full I have to hold a *puja*. Yes, at least during Chhonam I have to beat the drum and if someone with problems comes to me, for example with a headache or in pain, I cure him with water and *mantras*. I have complete knowledge and awareness even if I have never officially completely entered the profession. Sometimes, when a spirit possesses me and I refuse, I begin to cough and fall to the ground in a faint. A few days ago, after dinner, we were sitting in the family, talking around the fire, when I began to cough and suddenly my stomach was crossed by a wind and I fainted in my seat. That was caused by the spirit who wants me to become a *pande*. The first time this spirit tried to possess me, I was sixteen and already had two children. This spirit also made me a little crazy. I used to run away, running from one place to another and, at night, I went to sleep in cemeteries. I could not even stop myself crossing the river and people would find me when I had fainted and carry me back home. But I am still alive. I do not want to become a *pande*: when I was young I already had two children and also had to work both at home and in the fields. Now the jungle calls for me to come and my house tells me to go (this is a Nepalese saying which is used by people who feel they are nearing death), so it is too late, because I am old. I do not know exactly how old I am, but I have had the knowledge of a *pande* from when I was sixteen.'<sup>105</sup>

Sancha Maya is one of the few cases in which a certain equilibrium has been maintained and a compromise reached in which she must be a *pande* for at least one day a year, during the Chhonam festivities, despite her refusal to become a *pande*.

<sup>104</sup> From an interview with Gouri Maya Praja, Makwanpur District, 05:09:1994.

<sup>105</sup> From an interview with Sancha Maya, Chitwan District, 09:04:1995.

Today Sancha Maya is a peaceful and intelligent woman who has learnt over the years to control the situation which only gets out of hand at times. On these occasions, which are becoming rarer and rarer according to the husband, she loses her senses due to an attack brought on by the guiding spirit who has still not resigned itself to her refusal.

Sancha Maya's adolescent crisis and her temporary craziness can only lead us to consider the dramatic situation which most Chepang women face from early on in life, and the means used to distance themselves from the most difficult situations. In the case of the old *pande*, the loss of her beloved brother and a marriage which was certainly not a happy one<sup>106</sup>, together with two pregnancies which took place during adolescence and her miserable living conditions, famine and illnesses, certainly brought on a psychical imbalance which resolved itself by maintaining some sort of communication with her ancestors and brother through the shamanic profession.

The frequent escapes and losses of consciousness described during the period of imbalance obviously symbolize an escape from what was a hard and cruel reality. On the other hand, while the dreams which, as she was able to explain later, were accompanied by bouts of fainting or nights at the cemetery, served to pass on the necessary shamanic knowledge at the same time reviving family union from which Sancha Maya found the strength to go back and face daily reality and find the strength, almost unique, to oppose her destiny and refuse the duties which would have been required of her were she to become a *pande*.

Michel Perrin has examined the delicate matter of the relationship between behaviour which in our society would be interpreted as being deviant and their existence in a society where they are interpreted in a completely different way and seen as symbols<sup>107</sup>. The therapeutic facet of Shamanism has been much discussed, not only with regard to the patients but also initially to the shaman himself who finds a cure for temporary mental disorders while practising the profession. We must be extremely wary of using forms of interpretation too closely linked to psychiatry or psychoanalysis. Mental disorders experienced by a future shaman which in our society could easily be interpreted as forms of hysteria, are, within their own group, actually indicating a means, which in various ways, mainly cultural, will lead man to the encounter with the supernatural until he has mastered this sphere. This is considered by all to be real, concrete and existent, independently of whether it may be more or less visible and material.

For my part, I do not believe it would be correct to limit oneself to the study and interpretation only of the symptoms and causes which lead a novice, through the calling up by the supernaturals, to become a shaman.

A different and varied record of cases exists here and it is important that all the different personal stories and different psychology of the individuals involved are taken into consideration.

Of course, part of this record of cases, though not all, consists of situations in which personality disorders and Shamanism are closely interrelated. According to my personal experience, this is more evident in female Shamanism, probably for the aforementioned reasons. When dealing with this problem Perrin reports examples from the Guajiro, inhabitants of Venezuela and Colombia, which are of women, who,

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<sup>106</sup> Sancha Maya actually has another husband, who is also a *pande*: her first husband left her when her children were still young.

<sup>107</sup> Perrin, M. 1987. Shamanistic Symptoms or Symbols ? A case of Indetermination. *Anthropos* 82: pp.567 - 580.

after traumatic and painful events like the death of a child, and after serious bouts of depression, become shamanesses thus finding a solution to their own mental disorders<sup>108</sup>. One of these cases would appear to be similar to that of Sancha Maya: this is about a Guajiro woman who fell into a deep depression after the death of a much-loved son and then began to suffer from symptoms which were interpreted as being signs of shamanic vocation which was the woman made every effort to oppose.

When something happens to interrupt or obstruct the initiatory phase or when the candidate refuses the profession, as was the case with Sancha Maya, or for other reasons, not many situations are resolved positively.

In the course of my last mission, I encountered a man in a particularly poor village who was obviously mentally disturbed. Gautala Kancha, the name he was known by as no-one recalls his real name, was forced to abandon his shamanic instruction on the intervention of his family. Although Gautala is now married and has three children, he has speech difficulties, displays what I would define as being autistic behaviour and often disappears into the depths of the jungle in a state of semi-consciousness which is then followed by total amnesia of what has happened. It was his cousin, Kamala, who recounted the actual events as they had happened many years previously:

‘Gautala Kancha’s mother died when he was only a few months old, his father abandoned him when he was three and when he was five he suddenly disappeared and all the sisters and relatives began to look for him, crying and shouting. At first we thought that the child had been taken by the animals: we had still not found out that he had been kidnapped by the *ban-jhakri*. So we decided to turn to a *pande* who told us that the little boy would return in five days time, to the same spot where he had disappeared and he did actually reappear on the fifth day. We then took the child to the *pande*, so as not to lose him again, and he said that Gautala had been kidnapped by the *ban-jhakri* (who wanted him to become a *pande*) but that when they brought him back his knowledge was incomplete and he would never become a fully fledged *pande*. The man also told us that he would have mental problems and that he would disappear every now and then. When he was about seven, the child began to take the cattle to pasture and that is where his name comes from<sup>109</sup>. Even nowadays, especially if he eats food which is impure, he disappears into the jungle like a madman, sometimes only for a few hours, sometimes the whole day. It is impossible to follow him because he disappears. One day, Gautala was looking after the cattle, but in the evening the animals came back on their own. In the middle of the night the family set out to find him with torches, they searched the jungle and along the river bank. But in the end they had to turn back. The next day he reappeared in the same place where he had taken the cattle the previous day. Before he disappears, he makes a strange noise, like a deep shout and then goes into the jungle and becomes invisible: he becomes unconscious and then suddenly wakes up as if from a dream and does not remember anything.’<sup>110</sup>

This case is strikingly similar to one reported by Shirokogoroff which happened in a Manchurian village near Aigun in 1915:

‘A woman’s grandfather and father were shamans. Both of them died and left spirits (*vocko*). The spirits entered the woman and she began to tremble. A new shaman must be made, people said. However, the clansmen did not want it. Then they invited a shaman who investigated the case, interviewed the spirits and declared that . The clansmen agreed to wait. In the meantime the spirit again entered the woman and carried her into the forest, into the mountains. The clansmen rushed after her, but she quickly climbed up a tree, and sat there on the very top of it. The men could not get her down and returned home. Then she disappeared altogether, and after eight days of absence she returned home and said, , while actually she had been absent. Then she refused to eat and drink. Now she must become a shaman. In the course of the year all which is needed - the costume, the wooden

<sup>108</sup> Perrin, M. 1987, op. cit., p.577.

<sup>109</sup> Gautala Kancha actually means ‘little cattle boy’.

<sup>110</sup> From an interview with Gautala Kancha and Kamala Praja, Chitwan District, 19:04:1995.

instruments, and a spear, will be made for her. Then there will be a sacrifice to her spirits, a pig and some Chinese bread. During this year she will be attended by an old shaman, who will teach her.’<sup>111</sup>

Though the two episodes end differently, the behaviour of the main characters is similar, though one of the two, Gautala Kancha, was only an unknowing child who was more or less unaware of what was happening.

The fact that the shamanic instruction was interrupted by Gautala’s family and the initial opposition of the clansmen to the Manchurian woman sparked off crises of mental disorders which made both of them flee from the human world to take refuge in the forest and world of the spirits.

In the end, the woman’s clan had to agree to recognise her as a shamaness and by allowing her to be instructed by an expert shaman, mental order was restored to the novice who showed no signs of instability from that day onwards, also because her previous crises had been socially recognised and interpreted by the community as being ‘calls’ by supernatural beings and ancestral clan members.

For Gautala, however, there was no means of reinstating the interrupted instruction for the child who from that time onwards remained in a liminal situation between the world of the humans and that of the supernaturals without belonging to or mastering either one of these and without being recognised as a fully fledged *pande* by the community. In any case, little Gautala’s disappearance into the jungle and the subsequent interpretation of this by the *pande* called in by the family, did mean that when he grew up he was not considered to be mentally ill by the members of the village who were able to justify his frequently strange behaviour and crises as evidence of the *ban-jhakri* calling him.

Kamala then confessed that her cousin had always been a strange boy and explained this fact by stating that he must have suffered greatly by not having had his mother’s milk - his mother had died when Guatala was only a few months old- and by the fact that he had been abandoned by his father after which he disappeared into the jungle.

Probably, if this had not happened, Gautala’s behaviour would still have been associated with an illness caused by serious alimentary undernourishment, while after his disappearance, everything, even the strange behaviour of the child, was interpreted as being a sign and call from the divinities.

Although he has obviously suffered a great deal, Gautala has found a niche for himself in society and an equilibrium which has meant that he has even been able to get married and have three children and he is respected by the inhabitants of the village who turn to him for cures for illnesses which are not deemed to be serious.

The semi-*pande* can actually carry out some therapeutic seances though he himself has confessed that he does not know how this comes about and does not remember anything after the trance, nor does he know which divinities and spirits are behind his activities.

The case of Gautala Kancha would suggest that an initiatory call had taken place in the form of a kidnapping by supernatural beings. Not all *pande* are actually kidnapped at the beginning of their activities but some of those who have been are considered to be the most powerful.

In many geographical areas where Shamanism is present, there are accounts of initiatory kidnapping which often correspond to the novice actually physically disappearing from the village and these often bring on a state of semi-unconsciousness or even apparent death. These kidnappings are said to have lasted

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<sup>111</sup> Shirokogoroff, S. M. 1935, op. cit., p.346.

several days during which it is thought that the soul has moved off and is in the company of divinities and spirits. For example, in the case of the Buriats the young person elected by shaman ancestors isolates himself from the community and suffers from repeated losses of consciousness. These are interpreted by the family and village inhabitants as being periods when his soul is kidnapped by the spirits and taken towards the West or towards the East depending on whether the shaman is destined to become a white or black shaman<sup>112</sup>.

The Uzbek novice is pursued by the spirits for a long time and they cause crises and illnesses which can be both mental and physical. He is kidnapped and instructed, as it is reported in the long account given by the shamaness Achil, who, at the end of a long series of serious psycho-physiological disorders, was kidnapped by a spirit who the woman recognised as being a Muslim saint. Over a period of seventeen days, this spirit taught her the therapeutical practises and gave her the necessary means to carry out divinations<sup>113</sup>.

In many parts of Indonesia, particularly in the area of Mentawai, young people destined to become clairvoyant, who have many shamanic features, must be physically kidnapped by the spirits<sup>114</sup>. This also happens in different groups in the Andaman and Nicobare islands<sup>115</sup>.

Métraux describes how the Araucan shamanesses of South America, known as *machi*, often lie down as if they were dead or suffer from mental disturbances for several days which are recognised as evidence of their soul having been kidnapped from the world of humans in order to receive instruction from various spirits<sup>116</sup>.

There has been much discussion about experiences of death and rebirth experienced by shamans all over the world, in particular when the novice witnesses the dismembering of his own body in different forms. This is carried out by spirits who then have to fit the parts together again and takes place during initiatory kidnappings.

Similar accounts have been found in many Siberian groups in both South and North America, Australia and different parts of the world.

On being called by the spirits, the Yakut shamans remain in a state of unconsciousness in their *yurta* without nourishment for days, during which time the novice is witness to the dismembering of his body by spirit-birds who then put it back together again, at the same time renewing the organs of the body<sup>117</sup>.

The medicine men of the Australian ethnic group, the Arunta, are also believed to be kidnapped by spirits called *iruntarinia*, who, once they have taken all the organs out of the novice, then replace these with new ones after having inserted quartz crystals into them<sup>118</sup>.

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<sup>112</sup> Mikhailowski, V. M. 1984, op. cit., p.87.

<sup>113</sup> Basilov, V. N. 1995. The in Uzbek Folk Beliefs. *Shaman* 3 (1). Szeged: pp.3- 13.

<sup>114</sup> Loeb, E. M. 1929. Shaman and Seer. *American Anthropologist* 31: pp.60 - 89.

<sup>115</sup> Brown, A. R. 1922. *The Andaman Islanders*. Cambridge.

Sarkar, J. 1990. *The Jarawa*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.

Rizvi, S. N. H. 1990. *The Shompen*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.

Pandit, T. N. 1990. *The Sentinelese*. Calcutta: Seagull Books.

<sup>116</sup> Métraux, A. 1942. Le chamanisme araucan. *Revista del Instituto de Antropología de la Universidad nacional de Tucumán* II (10): pp. 309 - 362.

<sup>117</sup> Ksenofontov, G. V. 1955. Legendy i rassakazy o shamanach u jahutov, burjat i tungusov.

Friederich, A. and Buddruss, G. (eds.) *Shamanengesichsten aus Sibirien*. Munch-Planegg: pp.136 onwards.

<sup>118</sup> Spencer, B. and Gillen, F. J. 1927. *The Arunta, a study of a stone age people*. London: II: pp.391 onwards.

In order to be able to control the spirit world, and after they received a call from the spirits, the Kiwai Papuan shamans must become similar to them and therefore report assaults which take place at night, by the spirit of a dead man (*oboro*) who replaces all their bones with *oboro* bones and gives them a trumpet made of bone with which to call the spirits<sup>119</sup>.

The experience of contemplating the skeleton of one's own body which has not necessarily been dismembered beforehand by supernatural beings, is central to the initiation undergone by Eskimo shamans<sup>120</sup> as it is in certain rituals belonging to Tibetan Lamaism, which probably originated in the Bon<sup>121</sup>.

In Nepal, the supposed kidnapping of the future shaman by the spirits, though it does exist but does not happen frequently in many ethnic groups, is still not sufficiently documented.

Usually, and this is not limited to the Chepang, the spirit who carries out the kidnapping is the *ban-jhakri*, or shaman of the forests ('*ban*', (T419a), means jungle or forest). There are many *ban-jhakri* who are usually described as being men about fifty centimetres tall, completely covered in hair and whose feet are sometimes facing its back. The *ban-jhakri*'s wives are very dangerous in that they are powerful witches of the forest (*ban-boksini*<sup>122</sup>), hungry for meat and human blood. Accounts of these two figures are common and they can be encountered quite frequently in the forest, though some *pande* believe that they can only be seen by shamans. The *ban-jhakri*'s wives are taller than them, covered in hair, have their feet pointing to their backs and have long breasts. Chepang parents in particular warn their children and those who for some reason have to go through the jungle, to watch and run away quickly in a downwards direction if they meet a *ban-boksini* as she will likely fall over her long breasts which she throws over her shoulder when going upwards so as to be able to move much faster.

The *ban-boksini* is the most powerful of all witches and is feared by *jhakri* in many areas of Nepal. In September 1994 I was able to attend a ceremony held to pacify one of these witches who had been responsible for causing several dramatic events and calamities in a village. The seances held in honour of the wives of the shaman-spirits of the forest are linked to the first calls to the profession by the spirits received by the novice *pande* in that they are addressed to the *ban-jhakri* to whom prayers and requests for help in controlling their wives are sent. These *puja* are considered by all *pande* to be one of the most dangerous as it is believed that when the witch of the forest enters the body of the shaman, she could cause him to lose all control which could in turn bring on a violent attack on those present and could even cause the death of the *pande* himself.

The *ban-jhakri* and *ban-boksini* are inseparable, so much so that when referring to her in chants and invocations regarding her husband, the *ban-boksini* is often called the *ban-jhakrini*, where the term *jhakrini* is the female version of *jhakri*. It is tempting to say that these two figures represent the two fundamental aspects of Shamanism and this only goes to prove the impossibility of distinguishing between black and white aspects of the profession. It is no coincidence that the *ban-jhakrini* appears to be the only spirit who can destroy the control the *pande* has over his trance, no matter what

<sup>119</sup> Landtman, G. 1927. *The Kiwai Papuans of the British New Guinea*. London: p.325.

<sup>120</sup> Rasmussen, K. 1929. *Intellectual culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Report of the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921 - 1924 VII. Copenhagen.

<sup>121</sup> Nebesky-Wojkowitz, R. De. 1956. *Oracles and Demons of Tibet*. s'Gravenhage: Mouton.

<sup>122</sup> In Nepali the terms *boksi* or *boksini* are used to describe witches (T461a).

supernatural being, divinity or ancestor it has been caused by and it is for this very reason that she is greatly feared.

The *puja* I attended was presided over by two figures, a husband and wife who are both *pande*, Hare and Krishora. Only Krishora was possessed by the *ban-jhakrini* and when this happened her face was transfigured and movements affected and she actually attacked some of those present and, though these attacks were not too uncontrolled, they were closely observed by her husband who was visibly perturbed. At the end of the invocations and requests for help from the *ban-jhakri* in the name of the link which unites him to all *pande*, two earthen figures were brought out which had been kept hidden and imprisoned by planks of wood which symbolised the *ban-boksini* and her husband. These figures were more or less the same size and were in a sitting position, covered with hemp from maize which was used to symbolize the bodily hair and long hair and green powder which represented the world of the jungles and forests.

The two figures were placed upon a plate of leaves and quickly taken outside, quite a long way from where the seance had been held and a cockerel was sacrificed whose blood splattered over the effigies which were immediately stamped on and destroyed during a dance which celebrated their definitive departure. It was explained to me later that the ceremony had been successful in that, after the requests made by the *pande*, the *ban-jhakri* had been able to convince his wife to be satisfied with the blood of the animal and not ask for human blood.

During the kidnappings carried out by the *ban-jhakri*, the novices - who are usually small children- risk being devoured by the *ban-boksini* whose husbands only allow them to eat river crabs, earthworms and wild fruit but who are irresistibly attracted by human flesh.

Here are some of the more important accounts:

'I was made (a *pande*) by the inhabitants of the jungle, the *ban-jhakri*. My guru is a *ban-jhakri*. I was kidnapped by him when I was a child: he kidnapped me when I was three months old and kept me with him for three nights and three days. The *ban-jhakri* and his wife, the *ban-boksi*, kidnapped me. Before becoming a *pande* I had a dream: I was walking along by the river, in the jungle and my guru was teaching me everything. I was made to remember everything in the dream. I was kidnapped but I had no memory of this and three days later I was brought back to the same place I had disappeared from. Nothing happened after this for a long time. Later, when I was twelve, I began to shake and, during a dream, a guru taught me how to cure illnesses and how to call the *bir* and *bayu*<sup>123</sup>. This is not a task for humans: everything comes from the power of the gods. I did not need a human guru, everything came to me in a dream. During the dream, a figure came to me in the form of a small child and played with me, teaching me everything. It was the *ban-jhakri*, with long uncombed hair and a face similar to that of a human. His feet were turned to his back. During the dreams I had when I was twelve, I found out what had happened to me when I was three months old: (I saw) how the *ban-jhakri* had made me dance and learn to beat the drum...sometimes he hit me if I made a mistake. My parents told me that at the age of three months I had disappeared for three days and said that they had heard me crying in the trees at night but had not been able to see me. Three days later I was brought back to the place where I had been taken from. The first time that I trembled was when I was eight and I beat the drum for the first time when I was twelve. From the age of eight to the age of twelve, I had dreams in which I could see how I had been treated by the *ban-jhakri* and how he had fed me with cows' milk. The *ban-jhakri* said, . I remember the *ban-jhakri* teaching me to dance and play. I think he also cleaned out the inside of my body but I don't have clear recollections of this. Sometimes people complain that the cows do not have any milk- this is because the *ban-jhakri* takes the milk to feed the kidnapped children. The *ban-jhakri* does not allow the children to eat dirty things or food which has already been in someone else's mouth. If a child eats something like this by mistake, the *ban-jhakri* must clean out his insides and remind him not to do this again and make him dance and play the drum. No-one can be a real

<sup>123</sup> These are two malign spirits. (T445b; T435a.)

*pande* if the instruction is given by a human guru. The *ban-jhakri* can change his form: sometimes he appears in the shape of a child, sometimes as an adult. He walks alongside the rivers, moves about the tall mountains and, on his return from the mountains, wanders throughout the forests. There are many *ban-jhakri*, in the same way as there are many human families. If you are caught by a group of *ban-jhakri*, you become deaf and dumb and some even go mad.<sup>124</sup>

Some *pande*, however, can remember the cleaning operation carried out by the *ban-jhakri*. This is an account told by a young person who was confirmed a *pande* during the Chhonam Festival in 1994:

‘At the age of two I was kidnapped and lost my senses. There was something dark in front of my eyes. This darkness was transformed into splendour when I arrived at the house of the *ban-jhakri*. It looked like a palace. I saw the faces of my parents in the *ban-jhakri*’s face, sometimes that of my mother, sometimes that of my father. The *ban-jhakri* cut open my stomach and took out the intestines to clean out the egg I had eaten earlier. I had been kidnapped and I stayed with the *ban-jhakri* for a year. The *ban-jhakri* taught me the *phalaknu* and to play the drum. We usually played together.’<sup>125</sup>

Though the kidnappings carried out by the *ban-jhakri* usually take place when children are young, they may be the cause of later psychical disturbances:

‘My guru is a *ban-jhakri*. At the age of nine months I was kidnapped for seven days. The *ban-jhakri* taught me to play with the sun and moon in a cart. I also learnt to play with the *naga* and *naghini*<sup>126</sup> of the seven levels of the *patal*. I was brought back and taken to the same place I had disappeared from. Later, I went mad and had to turn to a *pande* who finished teaching me the *phalaknu* and thanks to the *phalaknu*, I learnt what had happened to me when I had been kidnapped. The *ban-jhakri* came from the East where the sun sets and kidnapped me. His name is Balasidda-guru and he is a *ban-jhakri*. At the age of ten I went mad, I would run away from humans and when someone tried to touch me I got even worse and became even madder. This situation lasted until I was fourteen when I played my first drum and, from then onwards, the madness cured itself. I didn’t feel any pain when I was mad but I could only think in a certain way. For a long time there has been at least one person in my family who was a *pande*. The *ban-jhakri* who kidnapped me had long dishevelled hair and has much bodily hair. (When I was kidnapped) he fed me on insects. The *ban-jhakri* has seven sons and they kept trying to devour me but the *ban-jhakri* protected me. Even now (during seances) when I ask the *ban-jhakri* for strength, I have to put the power of the sun and Indra onto my shoulders. At the age of fourteen I had my first *phalaknu* during which time I found out about all these things. The *ban-jhakri* also cleaned out my stomach, better than a mother and played with me, away from his seven children who will become *ban-jhakri* one day. Even the wife of the *ban-jhakri* tries to devour those who have been kidnapped by the *ban-jhakri* and so her husband must be very careful to keep them away from her. At that time, however, I was the only child that had been kidnapped.’<sup>127</sup>

The cases of female *pande* being kidnapped are very rare and in the course of my missions, I have only met one case in which a greatly respected and fairly powerful shamaness recounted what happened to her when she was young:

‘I have been a *pande* for thirty-five years. With the Chepang (*pande*), everything is sent by the goddesses, *naga* and divinities of the skies through dreams. The goddess comes in the form of a girl, while Bhumi<sup>128</sup> appears in the form of a man. Even the *naga* take on human form. During the dreams, the different ways of curing illnesses with the drum are explained. It is the *ban-jhakri* who comes and it is he who gives us the drum. At the age of seven, I went to get water in a small recipient and was

<sup>124</sup> From an interview with Narcing Praja, Makwanpur District, 03:09:1994.

<sup>125</sup> From an interview with Babulal Praja, Chitwan District, 05:08:1994.

<sup>126</sup> These are male and female serpent divinities (T338b) who are well known in Hinduism. According to the Chepang they live in the Underworld.

<sup>127</sup> From an interview with Meik Praja, Makwanpur District, 08:09:1994.

<sup>128</sup> The goddess of the Earth.

kidnapped by the *ban-jhakri* who kept me with him for seven days; he gave me a book to read: some need three months, some one and some fifteen days to complete their learning, but seven days were enough for me. All this happened in the district of Dhading at Thanti Kola. From the first the *ban-jhakri* gave me a book and then seven drums and with all seven drums I learnt the *phalaknu*. When I had completed my knowledge, the *ban-jhakri* sent me back. (During the kidnapping) the *ban-jhakri* would feed me with beaten rice which was really made of iron but also with milk, normal milk though I don't know where it came from. But most of the time he fed me with earthworms which come out during the monsoon season. Before I had been kidnapped, I would have dreams now and again and this was why the *ban-jhakri* did not open up my body to clean it out; I had been purified by the dreams. The book I was given was written in the Lamaistic script<sup>129</sup> but also in Nepali and in Chepang<sup>130</sup>. I was then given the seven drums: three of these were like the Chepang drums, with one surface only while the others were like the drums of the Tharu or the Tamang, with two surfaces. In my dreams I was taught how to call the different divinities who still help me today during the *puja*. During a dream the gods and goddesses of all directions gathered together and I had to make my presentation after which I was taught all the things I had to do during a *puja*. In the book given to me by the *ban-jhakri* there were also many illustrations. In his palace I saw that there was one room for the *ban-jhakri* and one for his wife, the *ban-jhakrini*. The *ban-jhakri* told me that if I was lazy and not studious enough I would be sent to the *ban-jhakrini*'s room and his wife would devour me. When I had finished studying the book, the instruction with the seven drums began and I was told that only after this would I be able to have my own drum. The *ban-jhakri* has a human form with long hair and bodily hair all over his body, both he and his wife have their feet pointing in the opposite direction to ours. At that time I was the only child to have been kidnapped; the *ban-jhakri*'s house is like a palace with many rooms, full of gold and silver. The couple have many servants, but I was never allowed to see them. The palace is located on top of a hill in the jungle. Before being kidnapped I could not read, I learnt to do this when I was kidnapped. The most powerful *pande* are those who have been kidnapped by the *ban-jhakri*. I had been having dreams from the time in which I was in my mother's womb and was then kidnapped. This was my destiny, created by the gods. I was born a *pande*. I was able to see all the dreams I had when still in my mother's womb in other dreams I had later on. I became a *pande* thirty-five years ago and I still have dreams now and then. I became powerful not because I wanted to but because this is what the gods had decided. No-one can become a powerful *pande* only because they alone want to be.<sup>131</sup>

It is not just the *ban-jhakri* who kidnap the future *pande*: in some cases, though these are quite rare, kidnappings may be carried out by other supernatural beings, usually linked to the aquatic world. This is the account of Jit Bahadur Praja who is generally known by the name of Pujari Maila:

'My father and grandfather were *pande*. I also became a *pande*, initially through dreams in which I saw people I did not know who ordered me to celebrate *puja*. Sometimes one of these figures told me to follow them in different directions: it could be to the South, North, East or West. My father had been kidnapped for six months by a *ban-jhakri*: he died when he was about forty. I began to learn some things from my father when I was ten. After he died, I began to work in the house of a Newar family and during that time I became mad: I would walk without reason around the village and I was completely mad. The inhabitants of the village of that time put me in a closed room so I would not escape but I was very strong: I broke through the boarded up window and escaped. I went to the river bank of the River Rapti: it was the festival of the full moon in the month of Bhado and I disappeared for twenty-four hours. All the inhabitants of the village began to look for me, and searched all night with their torches. The next day at dawn, I reappeared in the same place where I had disappeared from, I came out of the river, but my clothes were not wet, they were dry. I remember some things, I remember thinking I would have a swim in the river when, all of a sudden, while I was going under the water, I saw a flash of light and found myself on the bottom of the river in the company of some other people, just like we are here now. I saw a man with very long hair who said, At first I refused and said And the man said, I accepted and from that moment onwards I became a *pande*. The man in the dream

<sup>129</sup> The *pande* means that the text of the book or part of it was written in Tibetan.

<sup>130</sup> This is unusual as the Chepang language is an oral culture.

<sup>131</sup> From an interview with Dham Maya Praja, Chitwan District, 13:04:1994.

was a god and he is my guru. I have never had any human guru but I used to work with my father, not as a *pande*, but as an assistant: I prepared the dishes with the offerings and did other small things.’<sup>132</sup>

Kidnapping carried out by aquatic divinities, like the better known kidnapping carried out by the *ban-jhakri*, is recognised as a means of recruiting future shamans in different parts of Nepal, particularly in the valley of Bhuji, in central western Nepal. This area was examined by J. T. Hitchcock, who refers to the cases of two different shamans, considered to be especially powerful, who, on being called up, had been kidnapped when they were adolescents by the god of cold water and another divinity which supposedly took the novice to the bottom of a lake to instruct him only setting him free fifteen days later<sup>133</sup>.

What is different about the kidnapping of the future *pande* compared to other accounts of kidnappings of other shamans is the young age at which these take place where the child is sometimes only a few months old. Dreams are also extremely important and must take place before and after the kidnapping and must follow the time frame of the time spent in the company of the supernatural beings.

Dreams do more than just allow natural dialogue, and therefore instruction, to take place between the young *pande* and the divinities or his assistant spirits, and they actually reactivate past experiences which have temporarily been forgotten. The *pande* Narcing was able to remember dreams and the kidnapping which had happened to him when he was only three months old in dreams he had at the age of about eight. Meik Praja, in the previously mentioned account, says he learnt of the events in his past and the kidnapping by the *ban-jhakri* which took place at the age of nine months during his first seance and first trance which he experienced at the age of fourteen. The *pande* Dham Maya could even remember dreams she had had when she was still in her mother’s womb.

Almost all the accounts, both those reported here and others not included, seem to follow a similar pattern. The first series of dreams is followed by some form of kidnapping which takes place at an early age and which corresponds to actual, real disappearance from the village and consequent reappearance in exactly the same place from where the subject had disappeared. The new *pande*, still a child and unaware of what is happening, returns to the world of humans, having received his instruction and with his internal organs purified or cleansed in different manner or form. Then follows a lapse of time which could be long or short, but which usually corresponds to several years, in which there is total amnesia of the events during which, in most cases, adolescent crises of madness can be noted which gradually recede after a second series of dreams in which the novice is finally permitted to see everything that has happened to him up to now and is given access to the shamanic knowledge which he had received so many years before.

Common belief would have it that one is born with the destiny to become a *pande*, and that instruction is imparted both pre- and post-natally, independently of what the individual himself wishes. An old *pande* from the district of Chitwan, Bim Bahadur Praja, recounted how his parents would remember that as a baby he would refuse his mother’s milk. For seven days after the birth, the little Bim Bahadur refused any nutrition but in spite of this the child did not die. All the relations were quite taken aback by this and turned to a *pande* for advice. The *pande* told them that the child was receiving nutrition, spiritual nutrition, from the gods who had chosen for him to

<sup>132</sup> From an interview with Jit Bahadur Praja, Chitwan District, 09:04:1995.

<sup>133</sup> Hitchcock, J. T. 1976. Aspects of Bhujel Shamanism. Hitchcock, J. T. and Jones, R. L., op. cit. pp. 169 - 170.

become a *pande*. A few years later, during adolescence, Bim-Bahadur had a series of dreams in which his guru explained what had happened during the week in which he had refused his mother's milk and revealed what the child had not realised he knew.

Before becoming a real *pande*, individuals feel completely in the hands of the spirit world which has total control over them, so much so that it can hide previously acquired knowledge from them for years, and in some cases forever. When this is revealed or in some way recognised by the individual the latter may be subject to periods of mental instability which make them seek to flee the human world and be aggressive towards themselves and others.

Only when their condition has in some way been institutionalised, usually in the first ceremony celebrated by them, does the mental disorder appear to disappear completely and many bizarre or deviant behaviour patterns experienced before only reappear in trance when they are both controlled and brought on by the *pande* himself during shamanic ceremonies.

In this way, what was previously deemed as deviant behaviour dangerous for the whole community as it was both uncontrolled and uncontrollable, then becomes the means, not only for the *pande* himself, but for all the individuals who turn to him, by which the *pande* can come into contact with the supernatural world which is seen as being behind any terrestrial event, be it positive or negative.

Of the many *pande* I met, except for Gautala Kancha, the man whose relations had prevented him from acquiring complete shamanic knowledge, none have shown any sign of imbalance and all, both men and women, live an absolutely normal life during which the activities of a *pande* take place alongside agricultural activities. All Chepang shaman I met have families and children and are no different, during the day, from any other inhabitant of the village.

Only two of the more than forty *pande* encountered said they were not aware of any *pande* in the family. All the others, though they may or may not have been aware of it at the time, had inherited the profession, often directly (from father to son in most cases) or less frequently, indirectly, from grandfather to grandson.

There are often more than one *pande* in a family and, where there are also women *pande* present, there is a sort of family Shamanism, as, for example, in the case of Hira Bahadur Praja, a *pande* around forty years old who told of coming from a family in which the paternal grandfather, father, mother and at least two uncles were shamans.

The apparent importance of inheritance is denied by the *pande* themselves who, although they recognise that the profession is generally passed down from father to son, believe themselves to have been singled out by divine will.

Very few of them accept, and then only in part, the idea that they may have learnt something from those of their living relations who are *pande*. If they do recognize inheritance this only applies to those *pande* relatives or ancestors who are already deceased and who may have come back in spirit form to initiate their relative into the secrets of the profession. Only in this case can a passage of assistant spirits and clan divinities who have supposedly previously accompanied the activity of another *pande* ancestor become the main guides of the novice *pande*. It must be added that this is a rare occurrence.

In most cases, the main divinities and assistant spirits of a *pande* are strictly personal and are often kept a secret.

There are also rare cases in which individuals belonging to other ethnic groups, in particular that of the Tamang who usually live in close contact with the Chepang,

claim to have had dreams which were sent by Chepang divinities and therefore become *pande*, instead of *bombo* which is the Tamang term for the shaman.

In the course of one of my missions I was present at a therapeutical seance held by a Tamang who used the single surface Chepang drum with metal chains on the reverse in place of the two surface drum used by his ethnic group. Even the rhythms and invocations used during the *puja* were all Chepang. Bim Bahadur Tamang (this is the name of the *jhakri*) then explained to me that he had been initiated by Chepang divinities who made him become a *pande* in several dreams he had which took place on seven successive nights. In particular, there was a divinity from the *patal*, whose name was not revealed to me, who came to him in his dream often in the form of a tiger and gave Bim Bahadur a drum and a Chepang style golden curved drumstick. The same divinity explained to the shaman that in his life he would be able to hold seances with both the Chepang and Tamang drums as long as he underwent a test.

According to the *jhakri* the latter was to have taken place in a dream which was to appear on the seventh day and during which another Chepang divinity appeared and hit Bim Bahadur's chest with some form of magic weapon which Bim resisted and therefore did not die.

From that day onwards, Bim Bahadur became a *pande* though he often uses the two surface Tamang drum, especially when called to celebrate *puja* in Tamang villages.

Because of the very interchangeability of the roles of *pande* and *bombo*, the shaman must address a special chant to the gods, whatever the ceremony may be:

*'Oh guru, you have given me a single surface drum,  
the single surfaced drum has been given.  
Up to the three.....  
I am playing a single surfaced drum,  
but I can also play a double surfaced drum.  
Please, guru, hear me,  
I will always dance on the right surface  
to send away the demons !'*

All shamanic *puja*, both nocturnal ones and those held during the day without the drum for therapeutical purposes or for certain divinities who are only active in the light of day, always start with long invocations and chants addressed to the guru, or the supernatural beings and divinities responsible for calling up and instructing the *pande* presiding over the ceremony. Thus the link between them is re-established and the chants are used to recall the supernatural beings who are the subject of the *puja*. They also give strength and courage to the *pande* who thus feel they are invested with the power of their spiritual guru, assistant spirits and then the divinities who will be called upon for various motives. During this initial phase of the *puja*, the *pande* usually refers to himself and the patient for whom the seance is being held with the words *or* *.* This is used as a sign of respect and recreates the situation when, through kidnappings or initiatory dreams, the guru would impart their knowledge and power to the extremely young future *pande* who, in some cases, as we have seen, may even be new born babies. This is one of the initial invocations:

*'You, o great guru.....  
I am the little child who is taking your name.  
I bow my head in respect to you.  
I am at your service,  
I put my hands together, together with you.  
Guru, I am asking for your service,*

*paying my respects to you, searching for you.*  
*Do not be sad !*  
*You are the noble ones.*  
*You are the Brahmins.*  
*You are everything.*  
*You are the protectors.*  
*You are the ones who take care of everything.*  
*I am taking your name, oh noble ones, do not be angry.*  
*Two lakes have broken,*  
*one of them is sprained<sup>134</sup>*  
*it cannot walk, it cannot wander.*  
*You <sup>135</sup>who walk in search for food,*  
*I take your name.*  
*Do not be sad ! Do not be at all sad !*  
*Oh guru, guru.... it is in your name that I am saying these things.*  
*Oh guru, pardon me for your rage.*  
*We are bowing our heads in respect to you, our hands joined together,*  
*we put ourselves at your service.*  
*Ah ! Ah ! Do not be sad and pardon me for your rage !*  
*Great guru, great guru, great guru,*  
*arrow of the akas, arrow of the patal,*  
*guru of the akas, guru of the patal,*  
*all the kings.....*  
*I'm giving you a place...*  
*the gold recipient for water,*  
*I offer you water, in a gold recipient and I am putting some lights in this.*  
*This child is offering you water in a gold recipient*  
*and is putting some lights into it.*  
*We will make you an offering now.*  
*Do not be sad in your hearts !*  
*He <sup>136</sup>is a child and I am a pande,*  
*so, do not be sad.*  
*There are two of us, listen to me, I am bringing you here.*  
*The darkness of the world and the darkness of life,*  
*the day and night alternate every day, giving light and darkness.*  
*The sun sets and the moon comes out, giving the light of day and the night.*  
*Roof of the akas, patal,*  
*protect him ! protect him !*  
*The little pande is giving the guru to this world,*  
*to the world of children, not to the Sky.*  
*Protect the Sky !*  
*Listen to the child <sup>137</sup>and do not be sad !*  
*Tears from the eyes.....*  
*and do not make your hearts black.*  
*I am offering you water to quench your deep thirst, now.*  
*Crossing a famine, crossing a drought...*  
*I shall repay you not only with these,*  
*but also with other things.*  
*The divinities of the Sky, who walk around and around everything...*  
*the Sky is light,*  
*the world is light,*  
*everything is light, except me.*

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<sup>134</sup> The verb used in Nepali is 'markanu' (T494b), which is usually used, in most cases, to indicate a sprained articulation or muscle.

<sup>135</sup> In this case, the 'you' is addressed to the supernatural beings who have made a man fall ill as they were hungry for blood.

<sup>136</sup> This is the patient who is actually a fairly old man.

<sup>137</sup> Here he is referring to himself.

*Give me refuge ! Give me refuge !  
 I shall not be coming without a carriage.  
 Only walking about, bring the child....  
 Look there !  
 I am playing with the inhabitants of the dense forests <sup>138</sup>,  
 with the ban-boksini,  
 the witches get up.  
 Keep on the road which leads here,  
 do not dance in the shadow of the trees.  
 Oh, king moon<sup>139</sup>,  
 I shall sit on the destiny of Niu <sup>140</sup>  
 the destiny has been created.  
 Yama, do not call him from on high yet !  
 Do not call the king <sup>141</sup>, this year....  
 Do not call the king this year.....  
 the child <sup>142</sup> will call the life, oh guru,  
 bringing you food on the carriage.'*

### **Description and role of the drum and various other paraphernalia**

Any description of the shamanic paraphernalia of a *pande* must begin by looking at the most important instrument, the drum or *rin*, more commonly known as *ring* in Chepang.

The extremely important role played by the drum has been examined several times, especially for what it means to Siberian Shamanism, and attempts have been made to classify the different types of single skin Nordic drums. In 1893 G. N. Potanin<sup>143</sup> suggested different categories for the Siberian shamanic drums according to their grips which led to the following three types: Altaic, Tungus and Samoyedic. Almost seventy years later, E.D. Prokof'eva<sup>144</sup> reviewed this oversimplified classification and divided the drums into categories according to the position of the grip distinguishing between drums with internal grips (Ciuckci and Siberian Eskimos) and those with external grips like those used by all the other Siberian populations. The categories of drums with external grips were then in turn divided into four types: Southern, Western, Central and Far-Eastern.

S.V. Ivanov took these categories even further and divided the Siberian population into three groups according to the <sup>145</sup>.

Generally speaking Siberian drums are single skin drums which have chains and iron hangings with various symbols resting on the back and a crossed grip which

<sup>138</sup> This refers to the *ban-jhakri* and, at a later stage, his wife.

<sup>139</sup> For some *pande* the moon is male, while others consider it to be female which proves the personal component in interpretations of mythology.

<sup>140</sup> This is a dangerous planet sent by the lord of death, Yama raja, which can induce serious illnesses.

<sup>141</sup> The *pande* uses the term 'king' to refer to Yama and, at the end of this invocation, begs his guru to dispel the danger of his patient dying and dispel death from the community, at least for another year.

<sup>142</sup> He means himself.

<sup>143</sup> Potanin, G. N. 1983. O krestoobraznyx figurax na samanskix bubnax i pisanicax. *Izvestija Vostocno-Sibirskogo Otdela Russkogo Geograficeskogo Obscestva XXIV* (2). Irkutsk: pp.13 - 14.

<sup>144</sup> Prokof'eva, E. D. 1961. *Samanskije bubny. Istoriko-etnograficeskij Atlas Sibiri*. Moscow-Leningrad.

<sup>145</sup> Ivanov, S. V. 1977. Aperçu sur l'étude des tambours siberiens. *L'Ethnographie - Voyages Chamaniques LXXIII* (7475). Paris.

varies from drum to drum depending on the materials used and, of course, on the mobility of the grips. The skins on the drums are sometimes painted, usually with illustrations in the form of drawings which generally indicate the different interpretations of the divisions between the cosmic worlds and regions. In the Himalayan area there are two main types of drum which have been classified by Micheal Oppitz:

‘One type resembles Siberian drums in that it comprises a wooden frame - a Rahmentrommel - that is covered by a membrane on only one of its two sides, the other side being left open. This type, which may be called the Dhaulagiri drum because its distribution is roughly restricted to the region of the Dhaulagiri Massif, has its handle inside the frame. The other type, designated as the Eastern Nepalese shamanic drum because it is found in the Nepalese Hills east of the Dhaulagiri type, it strung with a membrane on both sides of the wooden frame, and its wooden handle is attached to the outside of the frame in a vertical position. It roughly resembles the Tibetan drum called *rnga*.’<sup>146</sup>

The second type of drum described above could be said to have been influenced to a certain extent by Tibetan Lamaism and, before that, by the ancient Bon religion which has a lot in common with Shamanism. Shirokogoroff believed that the circular form of the Tibetan drum which had two membranes and external grip was the first to spread throughout Asia and was used by the Eskimos and Ciucki and thereon modified and elaborated by various different Central Asian ethnic groups<sup>147</sup>.

The Chepang drum belongs to the first group described by Oppitz in that it is similar to the drums used by many Siberian groups. It generally varies in diameter which can be anything from forty to fifty centimeters, and the frame, which is about twenty centimeters wide, is made of wood from a tree called *sandan*<sup>148</sup> in Nepali and *bunsi* in Chepang. The membrane is made of goat’s hide. The *sandan* is the only tree considered sacred by the Chepang who also use this wood to make hoes.

The *ring* grip is fixed, internal and cross shaped. It is usually made of the same wood as the frame and then covered with a strip of the same goat’s hide as that used for the membrane, though one can occasionally find iron grips in the shape of a cross. There are a varying number of iron chains with different symbolic hangings fixed to the upper part of the frame by means of iron rings. These are located on the inside of the drum opposite the membrane and usually face the *pande* during seances. Chepang drum skins are never painted by the *pande* though, as we shall see further on, the *pande* often make similar complicated designs with coloured powders on the earthen floor in the course of ceremonies.

The *pande* explain that drums are not illustrated because the iron hangings on the end of the chains have the same function. Even the drumstick, which is called the *gajo* (T133a) both in Nepali and Chepang, is different from that used to sound the double membraned drum, as the latter is s-shaped and the former in the form of a golf-club about forty-five centimeters long.

Before examining the methods used to make the *ring*, I must point out that, although the two types of drum described above are the most commonly used shamanic instruments in Nepal, other means are also used to help the *jhakri* enter an altered state of consciousness.

<sup>146</sup> Oppitz, M. 1992. Drawings on shamanic drums: Nepal. *Res 22 - Anthropology and Aesthetics* : p.65.

<sup>147</sup> Shirokogoroff, S. M. 1935, op.cit., p.299.

<sup>148</sup> The tree known as the *sandan* or *sadan* tree in Nepal has unfortunately not been reported on by Turner in his classification. This is the brief description given of it: ‘name of two types of tree, one with round leaves, the other with long ones’. (T596b).

The first of these is the *thal* (T296b), which is simply a metal plate, about twenty to twenty-five centimeters in diameter, mainly used for daily and domestic purposes, and this is usually used by the *jhakri* who beats on the reverse side of it with a piece of wood.

The Limbu in eastern Nepal amongst whom there are several religious experts who all have shamanic features, have two figures, the *yeba* and *yema*, both called upon in case of illnesses thought to have been caused by *Nahen*, the spirit of envy and jealousy. Although these two figures wear shamanic costume, they do not use the two membrane drum used by their colleagues, the *phendagma* and *samba*, the first of whom is a shaman who fulfills all the functions and the second an expert chanter of myths and oral culture in general, whose power is recognised in his oral ability. The *yeba* and *yema* use the *thal*. There is also a fifth figure, the *mangba*, who is an expert at treating cases involving spirits of the deceased who are not at peace because they have died unnatural or violent deaths, usually suicides or landslides or, in the case of women, deaths which have taken place during or immediately after a birth. According to the case in question, the *mangba* will use either the drum or the *thal*.<sup>149</sup>

The Chepang *pande* can also use the *thal*, particularly when they are performing ceremonies during which the spirits called *bayu* or *vayu*, invisible malignant spirits which come in the form of a wind, are identified as being the cause of illness or various types of calamities.

In other ethnic groups which have unfortunately been little studied, like the Dhimial and the Meche in the Jhapa district in the south-east of Nepal, the shamanic drum is not used at all. When a patient needs a seance in which the presiding *jhakri* has to enter a state of trance, the dhimal shaman, called the *ojha*, uses a leafy branch or flower which is held and moved rhythmically to mark the rhythm. The Meche have vicarious trances: the presiding religious official is called *rojha* and it would seem that he never enters a state of trance and it is his assistant, who is responsible for acting as a go-between between men and supernatural beings, who is called on by him to enter this. However, on particularly important occasions, the *rojha* or more often the *dhami*, or indeed the figure mainly concerned with the magic of the harvest, will play a flute in public<sup>150</sup>.

When attending a shamanic seance, one has the impression that it is usually the rhythmic movement which facilitates entry into an altered state of consciousness, even when a drum is used. There are also reports of shamans who rhythmically move fans<sup>151</sup> or iron blades to which iron circles have been attached, though these are not always used as rattles<sup>152</sup>, or other objects, also used to facilitate entry into a state of trance.

In this case the mere movement of the air caused by the movement of a part of the body (see the reports written by R. Rahmann 1959, op.cit., and many cases he has described of shamans from different tribes who enter into a state of trance by using repeated rotatory movements of the head) or by moving an instrument which is in any case part of the art of a shaman, in itself produces something which, if not music, is rhythmic, a muted sound which it is thought can be heard by supernatural spirits.

<sup>149</sup> Jones, R. L. 1976. Limbu Spirit Possession and Shamanism. Hitchcock, J. T. and Jones, R. L., op.cit., pp.31 - 34.

<sup>150</sup> This information about the Dhimial and Meche has been collected personally by myself on a trip which took place in November-December 1993. For additional information on the Dhimial, see: Regmi, R. R. 1991. *The Dhimals, miraculous migrants of Himal*. Delhi: Nirala Publications.

<sup>151</sup> Young, L. J. 1981. *Korean Shamanism*. Huddersfield.

<sup>152</sup> Lewis, Paul and Elaine. 1984. *Peoples of the Golden Triangle*. London: Thames and Hudson.

But the function of the drum or other instruments or objects used by shamans in various parts of the world is not just limited to inducing altered states of consciousness. There are two different interpretations of this, that of the ethnologist or observer-scholar and those who are directly involved, the shamans and their public.

Several more or less valid theories have been put forward regarding the effects which certain types of intermittent sonic stimulation emitted by a drum can have on the brain<sup>153</sup>. Up to now, however, we still do not have any convincing results which can prove the neurophysical effects of the rhythmic sound of the drum.

I would prefer to analyse the significance of the drum for the shamans themselves, in particular, for Chepang *pande*.

In the words of Francesco Giannattasio:

‘The objects used to produce sound in shamanic rituals are, according to the protagonists, instruments used to mediate between the worlds of humans and the supernaturals: intermediates between the Heavens and the Underworld: apotropaic agents which can hunt and keep away the spirits: generators of signals or calls directed at the latter. The observation made by A. Schaeffner<sup>154</sup> (1936; it.ed., 1978,p.131): can be said to verify this.’<sup>155</sup>

The beating of a certain rhythm, which corresponds to a certain divinity, is equivalent to calling the divinity itself, inviting it to the seance and often inviting it to enter the shaman’s body, which is visibly shaken, though he or she never stops sounding the instrument according to precise rhythmic patterns. It is believed that the god or supernatural being possesses the man and that it is then the divinity itself which continues to sound the rhythm which distinguishes it from other entities called upon and which thus makes it easy to understand the duration of its presence amongst humans.

Rouget emphasises the importance of the difference between ‘possession music’ and ‘shamanic music’:

‘The great differences between possession music and shamanic music lie in the fact that the latter is often taken by a magic power while the first is not. It enounces it, identifies, makes movement. Its efficacy lies in its mechanical order. Its effects are practical: it calls on the gods, makes the dancers move, brings man and gods together, it emits. The shaman’s music has the contrary effect, at least in certain cases, of transforming the world. As Lévi-Strauss said<sup>156</sup>, it intervenes in the determinism of nature and modifies its course.’<sup>157</sup>

But the drum is not just an instrument which is used by the shaman to produce the kind of music described by Rouget. It has its individual characteristics and acts together with the shaman himself: it may be used as a mount for magic flights

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<sup>153</sup> It would not be appropriate to enter into a discussion here of such theories and suggested reading on this topic can be found in: Neher, A. 1961. Auditory driving observed with scalp electrodes in normal subjects. *Electroencephalography and Clinical Neurophysiology* 13: pp.449-451. The same author has also written an essay which is extremely relevant to the topic under discussion: 1962. A Physiological explanation of unusual behaviour in ceremonies involving drums. *Human Biology* IV: pp.151-160. Also see Prince, R. 1968. *Trance and Possession States*. Montreal: R. M. Bucke Mem. Soc.

<sup>154</sup> Schaeffner, A. 1936. *Origine des instruments de musique*. Paris: Mouton. (My translation).

<sup>155</sup> Giannattasio, F. 1988. I Rapporti fra musica e transe nello sciamanismo nepalese. Mastromattei, R. (ed.). *La terra reale. Dei, spiriti, uomini in Nepal*. Rome: Valerio Levi Editore: p.187. (My translation).

<sup>156</sup> Lévi-Strauss, C. 1962. *Le pensée sauvage*. Paris: Librairie Plon: p.262. (My translation).

<sup>157</sup> Rouget, G. 1980, op. cit., p.251. (My translation).

(Yakuts, Buriats, Karagassi, Altaics, Nencs, Tuvin etc) or as a hunter of malefic spirits in which case it can be substituted by a bow (Tartars, Lebed, Enc, Nenc, some Altaic groups etc) or can be seen as a repetition and image of shamanic cosmological concepts belonging to any one people, or even as the alter-ego of the shaman himself or herself. The instrument is usually seen as having its own 'personality', own life cycle (which does not always correspond to the life of the person who is using it) and is often considered to have its own soul or souls.

This is a quick summary made by Ivanov on the functions of the drum in the Siberian area:

'The sound of the drum can also be used as a means of instilling fear; and in the Amour region where it symbolises thunder, the sound is used to frighten off malefic spirits. This is because the Gold shamans savagely beat their drums on encountering ill-fated spirits. The drum symbolically represents the shaman's mount: the reindeer (Nenc, Northern Xant) or horse (Yakuts, Tuvin, Buriat) or even a bird used to travel with or boat with which to sail the mythical waters. It can be the bow with which the shaman battles against hostile spirits, as is the case with the Enc and Nenc. The designs often show pictures of the universe: stars, sun, moon etc. (Selkup, Ket, certain Evenk); their symbolism is often more complex (Sor, Altaic, Xakas). In some cases, the drum is the meeting place for the shaman's assistant spirits; for the Yakut, it is a shield or armoured plating which protects the shaman from attacks by enemy spirits.'<sup>158</sup>

The Chepang *pande* drums appear to have all the above functions apart from that of the mount used for magic flights. The fact that this function is lacking may be put down to the fact that the *ring* are never associated with and never assume any form of animal.

First of all, let us examine the important process used to make a Chepang drum. Unfortunately, not all *pande* are free to make drums because of the regulation governing the felling of trees which cannot be carried out without having obtained previous authorisation from the authorities. This regulation theoretically applies to the whole country. In fact, in the remoter areas where circumstances make it impossible to monitor the situation closely, trees are still being felled, not just for the purpose of making drums but also for the purpose of building houses and for domestic use. However, those Chepang nearer more important centres or nearer the asphalt road as well as those living in villages monitored by the Praja Development Programme, face a different situation: to obtain the authorisation to fell a tree, they must either apply to the authorities or face a fairly long prison sentence.

Even if this request is approved, forest guards are sent to the area and choose the tree to be felled on their own personal criteria. The tree is then marked with a sign indicating that it may then be felled. This process is totally incompatible with the needs of the *pande* whom the gods and spirits have appeared to in a dream indicating the tree to be felled in order to obtain wood for their *ring*. Only one *sandan* tree in the whole forest is considered suitable but it is extremely difficult if not impossible for this to correspond to that chosen by the tree selected by the authorities. I have met several *pande* who do not have drums for the above reasons and also because the drums are costly to make in that, as hunting is forbidden, the only hide which can be used is that of a domestic goat, a sacrifice the Chepang cannot permit themselves to make.

Luckily, the *ring* is not considered to be strictly personal and therefore the *pande* who find themselves without can generally borrow one from others. In those cases where more than one member of the family living in the same house is a *pande*, there

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<sup>158</sup> Ivanov, S.V. 1977, op.cit., pp.135 - 36. (My translation).

is usually only one *ring*. One could also interpret this as being an example of ancient family Shamanism. Dreams, just as is the case with initiation, play a fundamental role in the process of making a drum:

‘Not just any tree can be used to make a *ring*: only the *sandan*. The roots of these trees touch the leaves.

There is a bird (female) and it is she who finds the tree. A *pande* sings:

*There is a forest, above the forest flies a bird,  
and we sound the single surface drum.*

*The soul of a human may be taken by the witches;  
you are a bird,*

*you recognise the upper and inner part of the tree....*

We sing these words to the bird and she replies by pecking the tree seven times with her beak and so we know that this is the right tree. The soul is now safe and we thank the bird. After this, we go to the tree together. An expert *pande* must make the tree shake and make a leaf fall from the top of the tree. No-one is allowed to look up. Then we begin to cut down the tree. Only one of the *sandans* in the forest is the right one for the *ring*. Everything (which happens with the bird) takes place in a dream. With the Magar, the dream is brought on by a *bayu*, with us by a female bird. After the dream, in the light of day, the *cela* cuts down the tree: the expert *pande* is not allowed to do this: it must be cut down as soon as it begins to tremble....While it is being cut down the *sandan* appears to bleed, which means that it is the right tree for the *ring*. If it exudes a yellow resin, this means it is not the right tree. The bird which helps us to find the right tree lives in the *patal* and in our language is called Singsura.<sup>159</sup>

There are few cases in other groups in Nepal where the means used to select a tree is similar to that of the tree which is used to make the Chepang drum. We shall examine at least two of these cases here: the first can be found in an essay written by Fournier on the Sunuwar<sup>160</sup> shamans who are guided to the tree in a dream by their own assistant spirits. The second has been documented by M. Oppitz and tells of the Magar shamans whose ancestral spirit communicates with the novice in a dream and indicates where the tree to be used for making the drum can be found. The novice then goes to the forest together with another nine shamans and is given confirmation of the exact place where the plant is by the spirit of the spring. In contrast to what happens with the Chepang, the novice does not participate in the cutting down of the tree, nor in the making of the drum which follows this. This task is entrusted to the other nine shamans who, after the trunk of the tree has been felled, go back down the mountain literally riding the piece of wood, until they reach the place where they will work on it<sup>161</sup>.

Although the divinity or supernatural being who inspired the dream may or may not always be identified in the shape of a bird, almost all *pande* agree that in any case this type of dream only comes from those who live in the *patal*, the Underworld. This again emphasises the strong chthonious element of Chepang Shamanism which can be explained both in the myths of origin which see them as originating from the underground and in the mythology which we shall examine later on in this work.

Shamanism itself is believed by the *pande* to have its origin in the Underworld. This is where the first man who according to some was also the first *jhakri*, was created, as we shall see later when examining the myth of the creation of the world. The first *ring* was also created here, thanks to the Singsura bird who lives in the *patal*:

<sup>159</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja, Makwanpur District, 18:02:1991.

<sup>160</sup> Fournier, A. 1976. A Preliminary Report on the Puimbo and the Ngiami. The Sunuwar Shamans of Sabra. Hitchcock, J. T. and Jones, R. L., op.cit., p.105.

<sup>161</sup> Oppitz, M. 1981, op. cit., pp.124 - 125.

‘When problems began to arise on Earth for man, illnesses and so on, Singsura came forth from the *patal* and said, and then she ordered the men (*pande*): . At that time the demons could speak directly to humans, but Singsura ordered the men, With its beak, she pecked at (the trunks of) two trees called Dubaon-Chetra and Galvan-Chetra<sup>162</sup>. She indicated the tree and, from its wood, the people (*pande*) made drums to send away the demons.’<sup>163</sup>

The above description appears to be an important myth which explains both the birth of the *pande* and that of their drums and it is in fact in the very contemporaneity of these actions that the origins of Shamanism in its complexity and organs are to be found. The myth proves the fundamental importance of the *ring* in the fact that Singsura reveals the tree suitable for this purpose to the humans. Without this instrument it would not be possible for common human beings to send away demons and therefore the origins of the first *pande* can only coincide perfectly with the origin of the first *ring* . This would appear to be much more than a mere instrument and its existence is so closely tied up with that of its owner that it becomes an essential part of the latter.

From ancient times, it has always been the little Singsura who has appeared in a dream and, by pecking the trunk of the *sandan* tree, has indicated to the novice which tree was suitable. The dream itself was a means of communicating with the world of humans from the underground world where she lived. As we shall see, the Chepang believe that the Underworld is divided into seven levels and the Heavens into nine and it may be no coincidence that the bird pecks the trunk of the tree seven times almost as if she were indicating that it belongs to the Underworld where it is believed to have its roots.

In the accounts given by other *pande*, the supernatural beings responsible for guiding the novice in the dream to the chosen tree are the King and Queen of the *sandan* tree rather than the little bird and the former are accompanied by other elements and supernatural beings who are not always benign:

‘We have a dream, in which the right tree is chosen. In the dream a *pande* sees the King and Queen of the trees<sup>164</sup>, the soul of the drum, a tongue of flame and a storm. All these things guide the *pande* to find the right tree. The next morning the *pande* takes some rice and goes to the place where the tree is: he throws the rice at the tree which then begins to shake. While the tree is trembling, the *pande* must embrace its trunk and then cut it. The King and Queen of trees are the souls of the *sandan* trees. The Queen is called Rai-Bunsi and the King Citreima-Mureima: they can be accompanied by malefic spirits and by *ban-boksini*: one has to be able to differentiate between them. But these demons or even the King or Queen can be inside the trees: this is why we must be able to choose the right tree, in exactly the same way as we can distinguish bad men from good while sitting here. You have to be careful with the King and Queen, the souls of the trees: if you use them in the right way, they will help you, but if you make a mistake, this can be extremely dangerous for the *pande* who may fall ill immediately and begin to lose weight, perhaps even die.’<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> The Chepang distinguish between two types of *sandan* or *bunsi* according to whether the inside of the tree is reddish (in which case the tree is called Dubaon Moungro) or blackish (the *sandan* is then also called Galvan Moungro) in colour.

<sup>163</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja, Makwanpur District, 08:12:1992.

<sup>164</sup> Although these two figures may appear to belong to the realm of the Earth, they actually belong to the Underworld, in that all *pande* believe *sandan* trees to have their roots in the *patal* and therefore come from there.

<sup>165</sup> From an interview with Narcing Praja, Makwanpur District, 03:09:1994.

The danger may also be accentuated by the fact that the soul of the drum may not want to stay in the world of humans, and may attempt to flee in order to live amongst the divinities, which would actually put the life of the *pande* at risk:

‘In the dream, there are two types of trees: a male one and a female one. We must choose the first of these. These trees are created by the gods who are like parents to them. For example, if a woman marries, she must go to live in her husband’s house, but sometimes she wants to return to her parents’ house. In the same way, the drum may want to return to the gods and if it manages to do so, it is very dangerous for the *pande* who will have wounds all over his body, feel ill or feel an extremely painful burning sensation like that caused by chilli. A *pande* knows when the drum wants to leave because he has a dream in which his mother, sister or a pigeon appear. The mother and sister are never real, it is just during the dream that the *pande* believes this to be the case. If one of these figures appears to be angry with the *pande* and takes his gaze off him, this means that the drum is trying to get away.’

Many *pande* attempt to gently convince the tree of their intentions in order to prevent the soul of the drum from escaping:

‘I received all the orders in a dream. Then I went to the forest and found the right tree, I purified it and cut it down. Once you find the tree, you have to make offerings of chicken’s blood and we must try to convince it, in a very kind way, of the need to cut it. If we were not to do this, the soul of the tree could go to the *patal* or into the high mountains, but, if we convince it gently, its soul is in our power and it will never be able to move unless we tell it to do so.’<sup>166</sup>

It is obvious that the drum is believed to have a personality of its own and is believed to possess one or more souls. In some cases, the tree to be felled is compared to a young girl whose hand in marriage must be requested by the *pande*:

‘We have a dream, in the dream there may be an old woman or a man or a girl: it depends on how old the tree is, on whether it is old or young. During the dream, the person who comes says, ‘The next morning the *pande* goes to the tree, throws the rice at it and the tree must tremble. Then the plant is cut and the drum is made. That night (after the drum has been made) the *pande* celebrates a *puja*, during which he transfers the soul of the tree into the inside of the *ring*. The next morning, when the *puja* is over the tree must die, as its soul is now inside the drum.’<sup>167</sup>

Once the correct tree has been chosen, the process of making the drum must not take more than five days and is known by the Chepang as ‘*poughadin*’: during these five days some *pande* have other signs which confirm the choice of the tree.

It would be extremely dangerous to make a mistake at this point as it is during the period between the cutting down of the tree and the making of the *ring*, at the end of which there is an important nocturnal ceremony, that the soul is given to the drum and it is inaugurated<sup>168</sup>, during which ceremony the drum is used for the first time in public by the *pande*.

The fact that the *ring* has only one membrane in contrast to the two membrane drum used, for example, by the Tamang is explained by the *pande* in various ways. Double membrane drums usually have a female surface and a male surface, while the *ring* is only recognised as being male and is usually associated with a hunter, therefore obviously a man, sent by the *pande* to find the cause of an illness or, in the case of divinations, lost persons or other objects.

<sup>166</sup> From an interview with Dam Bahadur Praja, Dhading District, 09:03:1994.

<sup>167</sup> From an interview with Jit Bahadur Praja, Chitwan District, 09:04:1995.

<sup>168</sup> Many Siberian groups hold important ceremonies after the drum has been made and these have the purpose of bringing the soul of the drum back to life. See Lot-Falck, É. 1961. L’animation du tambur. *Journal Asiatique*.

In spite of the instrument's male features, it must be emphasised that there is actually a strong female presence in the drum: the mythical bird which allowed the humans to make the *ring* by revealing the secrets of the *sandan* trees is female. In the account of Jit Bahadur Praja, the *pande*, independantly of whether he is in fact a man or woman, is given the hand in marriage of the girl, the tree's soul, the daughter of a supernatural being who appeared to him in a dream, and thus the age of the tree was symbolised by the age of the latter. Moreover, when it is believed that the *ring* wants to escape, the *pande* will dream of a bird or two women who he believes to be his own mother or sister who really represent the soul of the *ring*. In many cases the drum has a name which is kept a secret but which is usually the name of a female<sup>169</sup>, and is moreover linked to a divinity which is both its owner and assistant, almost always recognised in the figure of some local goddess with whom the *pande* has a special relationship.

According to the *pande* Dham Maya Praja, the *ring* actually has sixteen female souls which are divided into two groups, one of nine sisters and the other of seven. Her account also contains another explanation of the fact that the Chepang drum has only one membrane, given that the Chepang can travel into the Underworld and in particular to those areas of the *patal* where any other *jhakri* of any other group would die immediately:

'(After the *ring* has been made) we must hold a *puja* during which we must call the nine souls of the drum and then the other seven souls. There are nine qualities and these are the nine sisters of the drum. We must also call up the nine sisters in our dream, but not directly; we must follow a particular procedure which is very difficult, if we make any mistakes, we put our lives in danger. The nine sisters are the souls of the *ring*. The Tamang drum does not have these. During the *puja*, I must call the nine and the seven sisters by name, through the *phalaknu*. The *puja* is held at night, but never in the month of Fagun (February - March), when the trees are in bud. The Tamang *jhakri* go into the Skies, they do not want to go into the *patal*; they do not have these souls in their drum. Our drum is made of *sandan* wood, the Tamang drum of *koiralu* <sup>170</sup> wood. The souls of the single membrane drum help us to go down into the *patal*, while the Tamang do not go there and therefore their drum is closed. During the *puja* the souls walk in front of me, like a strong light and I must follow that light. I follow it and when I arrive at my destination, it could be the *patal* or the *akas*, I order the drum. When the *pande* finds which spirit has kidnapped the soul he or she orders the drum, '<sup>171</sup>

There is another interesting myth which explains the reason why the Chepang drum only has one membrane, a prelude to the conviction that the different styles of the two drums, Chepang and Tamang, are due to the fact that the *pande* can travel into the *patal*.

'A long time ago there were two brothers: one was a lama (he means a Tamang lama) and one a Chepang. They decided to have a competition to see who would be able to reach the realm of the gods the fastest. The Tamang thought, The Tamang lama did not go very fast for this reason. The *pande* crossed the *patal* and was about to reach the limits of the land of the gods when the other saw him. The Tamang flew very fast and both found themselves near their aim. The lama kicked the Chepang drum and broke one of its surfaces and was the first to arrive in the land of the gods. From that day onwards

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<sup>169</sup> Only on two rare occasions have I been told the actual names of the *ring*, and was begged to keep these a secret. The connections between the names and Chepang mythology are very interesting but, as I am convinced of the need for some sort of moral code in our work, I shall not reveal the secrets of the names.

<sup>170</sup> (T105b), this is the *Bauhinia Variegata*.

<sup>171</sup> From an interview with Dham Maya Praja, Chitwan District, 13:04:1995.

the *ring* has only had one membrane. The Chepang are *tunsuriban*, because they can play with the *patal*, while the Tamang are *urghsuriban*.<sup>172</sup>

It must be noted that the competition is not between two shamans but between a *pande* and a lama. On the other hand the lamaist drum is very similar to that of a Tamang shaman and many Chepang believe the latter to derive from the former.

The Chepang myth is similar in parts to another account which features a shaman and a lama, both belonging to the Sherpas. In this account, which was told to me by my guide, Jitman Sherpa, the lama and the *jhakri* decided to compete against each other to see which of the two could reach the land of the gods before sunrise. The lama decided to sleep for a while as he was confident in his ability to fly fast, while the shaman began to sound the drum immediately, reaching almost half way point. The lama, however, realised what was happening and flew extremely fast, overtaking the shaman to win. The agreement was that whoever won would have the right to do anything he wanted to the loser. Up to that time the *jhakri* had had written texts and the lama decided to tear them all up: from that day onwards the *jhakri* have never had any form of written texts.

The mythological explanation of the difference between single membrane and double membrane drums does not seem to be limited to the Himalayan area. Éveline Lot-Falck reported an interesting Mongolian myth<sup>173</sup> to this effect which emphasises that all drums once used to have double membranes. One of the main Mongolian divinities, Esege Malan, who was disturbed by the power of the shamans, decided to eliminate one of the membranes and thus limit their power. In another version of this account Esege Malan is replaced by the Dalai Lama who made the shamans less proud and less powerful by removing one of the membranes on their drum with a view to ensuring the future and definitive victory of Lamaism over Shamanism.

In both cases the loss of one of the membranes is linked to a loss of power, which is not the case or is at least does not appear to be the case in the Nepalese myths examined, in particular the Chepang one which examines the possibility of the *ring* being initially similar to the lamaist drum, emphasising the importance and influence of the latter in the Himalayan area.

It is interesting to note that both the Nepalese myths and the second version of the Mongolian myth indicate some form of opposition and conflict between Shamanism and Lamaism. Both in the Chepang myth and in that of the Sherpas it is the lamas who arrive at their goals first, though they initially underestimate the power and speed of the *jhakri*. The powers and competences are diversified and the lama attempts to reduce the power of the shamans, which is also seen in the second version of the Mongolian myth, in which the Dalai Lama himself actually wants one of the membranes on his adversaries' drum to be destroyed.

The Chepang are perhaps the only ones not to note a real loss in the loss of one of the membranes of the *ring* caused by the kick given by the Tamang lama, while for the Sherpas, the *jhakri* has to give up all his texts on losing the competition. Even in the case of the Sherpa it would be preferable to talk of the establishment of a profound differentiation between the two religions rather than an actual loss, given that in any case it is not sure that the shamans had to renounce part of their power along with the loss of their texts.

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<sup>172</sup> From an interview with Meik Bahadur Praja, Makwanpur District, 08:09:1995.

<sup>173</sup> Lot-Falck, É. 1961. A propos d'un tambour de Chamane Toungouse. *L'Homme* 1 (2). Paris: p.26.

As for the iron chains with symbolic hangings on the end hooked on to the opposite side of the frame of the drum to that of the membrane, the *pande* are extremely reserved about their purpose. Alongside conical shaped hangings there are usually also different figures in the form of suns, moon, and stars and also miniatures of magic weapons, usually knives and blades and sometimes arrows. There are also hangings which appear to be of casual nature, each of which are usually important though their secrets cannot be revealed to others.

It is obvious that the various iron hangings are an important protection against possible attacks by spirits and malefic beings, and are believed to be able to counterbalance the acts of the latter and perhaps function as real magic weapons. The drum is recognised as having its own individuality which is only incarnated in the form of a figure, usually described as having human semblance, of a hunter whose clothes and arms are represented by the membrane made of goat's hide and the iron chains and hangings present to the back of it; while the wooden frame is thought to be his belt. During the numerous chants which take place in the course of a *puja*, the *pande* often turns to the drum, inciting and admonishing it as if it were human with the following words:

*'I am asking you to be intelligent...*

.....  
*Your skin<sup>174</sup> is your clothes,*

*Look after it !!*

*If you lose it you may have to go around in the nude !'*

The *pande* and the *ring* are closely linked, the *pande* often define their relationship with the drum as being one of friendship, but it is actually a strong form of interdependence, at least during a *puja*, if we are to consider that the *ring* is often lent out to others.

The *pande* Krishora had the following to say about this:

*'I can think of my ring in many ways: as a child, a slave and a guru. The drum is everything. Without it we *pande* cannot work.'*<sup>175</sup>

Generally speaking, the *pande* do not use their drum as a means to travel to other cosmic worlds, though they do take their drum with them as we can see in the account told by Dham Maya where the *pande* explains how the sister-souls of the *ring* lead the way into the other worlds in the form of a bright shining light. According to other accounts, the drum travels with the shaman who keeps it tied up in such a way that it looks like a kite. When he finds the cause of an illness or the reason behind the kidnapping of a soul, the *pande* then breaks the cord and lets the drum go, and the drum, in the guise of a hunter, goes to retrieve the lost soul by fighting against the hostile forces.

The *ring* is a gateway between the world of humans and that of the supernatural ; inside it the *pande* declare they can see everything that is happening in the Underworld or Heavens and Earth when carrying out divinations held to find a person or more rarely, an object which has been lost. It is because of these very functions that the *pande* associate the drum with a mirror which reflects the events of the *akas*

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<sup>174</sup> Here he means the goat's hide used for the membrane of the *ring*.

<sup>175</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja, Makwanpur District, 06:03:1994.

and *patal*. It is sometimes also compared to binoculars, in the case of those Chepang who have some knowledge of this instrument:

‘The drum is like a pair of binoculars, through which I can see the people who are attacking me with black magic; magic arrows; illnesses and even the mistakes I have made in previous *puja*. The soul of the drum tells us of these things and shows them to us: the sun, moon, ocean in the *patal*, the rainbow. All these things can be seen inside the drum. It is like when a cloud moves in the sky: this is what I see, but it is very fast, like lightening in a storm. At the beginning (of a *puja*) the *pande* orders the drum to protect him, to build an iron gate round him and to place all the clouds of the high mountains in a fishing net, thus pulling the net up to the foot of the mountains so as to protect him. The *ring* has sixteen friends<sup>176</sup> who help him to get his information. While they are gathering information, I can see them for an instant, like the flame of a match. When I see these little flames all the people attending the *puja* must be very peaceful, otherwise, if the flames take fright they might be in great danger.’<sup>177</sup>

Meik’s description practically summarises all the main functions of the *ring*: it reflects other realities and other cosmic worlds, protects the shaman, is a hunter of malefic beings, and gathers the information necessary to solve any case at hand.

Obviously it is tempting to think of the *ring* as the alter-ego of the *pande*: wherever the *pande* cannot go in person, he sends the drum, and what the latter discovers and sees is immediately passed on to the *pande* himself and revealed to him in a vision.

That the *pande* may be personified in the *ring* would appear to be proved by yet another fact: when someone in a village is nearing death, the shaman will normally receive a dream in which he sees a tree falling in a thick forest. If this is not any one specific plant, this means that one of the inhabitants of the village will die, but if the tree he sees is the *sandan* tree this means that the person to die will be a *pande*.

It is believed that the *ring* can never die and this because, paradoxically, it begins its life with the death of the tree and that of the goat whose hide will be used as a membrane:

‘The drum never dies; it has already died once when the tree was cut down and the goat killed. The meat of the goat is shared out and eaten, the wood is already dead when we make the *ring*. When the drum is ready, we must make it come back to life. We call the soul of the goat and all three of us work together to cure illnesses. The three of us are: the skin, the wood and me, the *pande*. Once it has been resuscitated it will never die again.’<sup>178</sup>

Let us remember that when the *sandan* is being cut down, it must bleed, or give off a red-coloured resin. During the *puja* held after it has been made, the *pande* must activate the drum, giving it its soul or souls, according to different perceptions of the drum.

Let us now examine the role played by the music sounded by the shaman on the membrane of his instrument. The drum is used to accompany the chants, invocations, prayers, whistles and all sonorous activities in general, even the sound made by the jingling of the bells worn by all *pande*. These are sewn on to a piece of material or leather or may even simply be joined together by an iron chain in the form of a bandolier. During a seance the sounds, whatever they may be, chants, rhythms, whistles or the sounds produced by moving the chains at the back of the *ring* tell us what is happening in this and the other worlds visited by the shamans. Sounds

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<sup>176</sup> He probably means the seven and nine sisters. The Chepang do not differentiate between the masculine and feminine forms of words.

<sup>177</sup> From an interview with Meik Praja, Makwanpur District, 16:09:1991.

<sup>178</sup> From an interview with Hare Bahadur Praja, Makwanpur District, 12:12:1991.

construct a new cosmology and equilibrium and, most of all provide the common ground for the language and non-language used between man and gods.

The language of men is considered to be only one of many languages, too humble to be of any interest to gods and goddesses. When making his *newring* the novice *pande* must communicate with Singsura, the little bird of the Underworld, in the form of a sung dialogue as every divinity and supernatural being has its own rhythm and sound which, when interpreted by the shaman vocally and through the sound of the drum, calls up the divinity itself. The rhythms sounded on the *ring* fall mainly into two categories: one is less violent and faster and is directed at the *akas*, while the other is slow and beaten hard on the membrane and is usually directed at the inhabitants of the *patal*. These two categories have different variations which are used by the *pande* according to which category of supernatural beings' presence is required.

Eliade talks about the 'magic of sound'<sup>179</sup> when referring to exorcisms of demons and malefic beings, but the function of the drum and other instruments producing sound is not limited to this alone.

In fact the *pande* have very sophisticated concepts of shamanic music. Some believe that the rhythms sounded on the *ring* are its eyes, thus reinforcing the personalised vision of the *ring*:

'The sound made by the *ring* is its sight, it looks around at everything. When I beat more slowly, this means that the drum is also looking around slowly, perhaps looking for malefic beings. According to the speed of the rhythm it looks round and brings different beings.'<sup>180</sup>

The music produced by the *ring* can be interpreted in two ways: it permits the drum to acquire sight and permits it to conduct searches and investigations, and it also functions as a means of transporting supernatural beings to the world of humans.

The same functions, as well as that of protecting the *pande* from enemy attacks, are also recognised as being provided by other instruments owned by the *pande* which produce sounds which may or may not be able to be heard by humans.

It must be said that in contrast to what happens with many other ethnic groups in Nepal, the Chepang *pande* do not have a shamanic costume. The men do not wear any particular clothes while the women often wear a white turban. Some *cela* wear a red turban during the Chhonam Festival.

The distinction made between the two colours white and red can be noted throughout many parts of Nepal. Those Tamang *jhakri* considered to be the most powerful, for example, wear a turban made of two pieces of material, a white-female one and a red-male one. The male Chepang *pande* never wear any type of head gear: it is only the *cela* and women who do so. The latter in particular say they do so in order to be more like men. In fact, all male subjects in the kingdom of Nepal wear a special type of hat (*topi*, T247b) which is made of cotton, and has the shape of a conical trunk which is in fact one of the symbols of the country. The female *pande* encountered have said that during the *puja* they must have the strength of a man in order to be able to confront real magical battles with malefic beings and spirits. This is why they wear a turban which is white in accordance with the fact that white is of the female sphere. Female *pande* are not allowed to wear any other type of head covering, least of all the *topi* which is strictly male headgear.

<sup>179</sup> Eliade, M. 1951, op.cit., p.198.

<sup>180</sup> From an interview with Krishora Devi Praja and Hare Bahadur Praja, Makwanpur District, 07:12:1992.

The red turban is one of the *cela*'s prerogatives<sup>181</sup> even though this would only seem to be limited to the area of Makwanpur, perhaps because of the strong Tamang influence, and indicates both the fact that the person wearing it has not yet become a *pande* as well as the fact that he is male.

Male shamans or religious experts, both in Nepal and in various other tribes of Central-Southern India, wear red turbans<sup>182</sup>, though no information was available on women.

Another phenomena can also be observed in the Chepang though it is quite rare, that of what has been called reversed 'ritual transvestitism' after studies carried out on the costumes and typical behaviour of some Siberian shamans who were dressed in clothes which resembled female clothing. In Nepal, as is the case with other Central and Northern Asian areas, there are groups in which the shamans put on clothes which are similar to female dress during ceremonies. For example, the Tamang *jhakri*, Thulung Rai, Sunuwar, some Limbu and others, wear bodices and long white ankle length skirts.

In the case of the Chepang, however, it is the women who assume male characteristics and the only way they can do this is to wear a head covering.

Chepang Shamanism is still closely linked to hunting, though this is carried out in secret, given the ban on hunting we have already mentioned, and happens more and more rarely. One of the most important ceremonies is the *Namrung-puja*, held annually in honour of the god of hunting, which is also the only divinity common to and known by all *pande*, whatever area they are from. Even the drum often assumes the form of a hunter.

Given the above, the behaviour of Chepang shamanesses is quite normal, nor is it unusual for there to be so few of them. Chepang female Shamanism could be considered to have different origins from male Shamanism whose primary role was to propitiate the beatings before the hunt which could not be carried out without a *pande*. It may not have been until some later moment, when hunting activities had to be abandoned and the *pande* had fewer functions, that male and female Shamanism actually merged though there is no difference between them, given that even women celebrate *Namrung-puja*.

As far as male *pande* are concerned, there is no shamanic costume as such though there is a form of 'ritual nudity' which is practised during more important ceremonies during which the *pande* undress, leaving only the white loincloth, after which they place ritual necklaces and the bandoliera of bells on their bare skin.

On the subject of Eskimo shamans, K. Rasmussen<sup>183</sup> notes that they do not have any ritual costume apart from a leather belt which has various symbols and hangings on it that they wear when they have undressed.

In the same way, the Chepang *pande*, for particularly important *puja* and whenever holding ceremonies in honour of the god *Namrung*, will, after preparing the altar, remove their everyday clothes leaving only their loincloth which was, up to about ten years ago, and still is in remoter areas, the only piece of clothing worn by men apart from a light-coloured shawl.

The other paraphernalia belonging to the Chepang *pande* are common to many other groups in the country. The bandolier of bells and two necklaces are particularly

<sup>181</sup> As I have never met any female *cela*, it is impossible to say if they wear red or white turbans. The *pande* I have interviewed have expressed contrasting opinions on this matter, perhaps because they have not had direct experience of this given the scarcity of shamanesses.

<sup>182</sup> See the description given by R. Rahmann of the Maler shaman: Rahmann, R. 1959, op.cit., p.173.

<sup>183</sup> Rasmussen, K. 1929, op.cit., p.116.

important: of these the first is made of *rudraksha* seeds (*Elaeocarpus Ganitrus*, T 539b) and the second of round black seeds. The *rudraksha mala*<sup>184</sup> is very commonly used in Hinduism; all the rosaries linked to the Shiva cult are made of these seeds as the god Rudra is one of the characteristics of Shiva. *Rudraksha* literally means 'from the eyes of Rudra', while 'rud' in Sanskrit means weeping in that, according to a myth surrounding the origins of this important divinity as reported in the *Vishnu Purana*, the little god cried for a long time after he was born, so much so that Brahma called him 'Rudra'.

The seeds of the *elaecarpus* are recognised both in India and Nepal as having extraordinary magical and therapeutical qualities. They are believed to be the best means of defense against attacks by demons, malefic spirits and witches and not even the messengers sent by the god of death, Yama, can take anyone who is wearing *rudraksha*.

The necklace with black seeds, which is called *kala mala*, or black necklace (T90a) is said to have the same functions as the *rudraksha mala* although in some cases the *pande* regard the *kala mala* as being more important and small objects which are of great value to the *pande* are inserted in between its seeds, such as small fossils or little stones with holes in them which have symbolic significance, usually recognised by *pande* as being parts of mythical animals which have fallen from the sky.

The two necklaces and the bandolier with bells on it are worn every time the *pande* goes to sound the drum and taken off during pauses. According to the shamans, they protect the shoulders, breast and back from attacks by malefic beings and also send continuous requests for help to friendly supernatural beings.

The leather strip or piece of material or simple chain worn as a bandolier to which many different kinds and sizes of bells are attached is almost silent until the *pande* enters a state of trance, the jerky movements of which make the hangings sound and announce the arrival of the divinity in the body of the shaman. In a certain sense they function in much the same way as the drum does, when different beats serve to determine which of the supernatural beings has arrived.

The abovementioned objects are all, with some small variations, part of the paraphernalia of every *pande*, though, like the *ring*, these are not strictly personal and where both husband and wife are *pande* the couple share the paraphernalia which there is only ever one example of.

During seances each Chepang shaman uses a few other objects which change from one individual to another but which are usually weapons for use against malefic spirits during *puja*. They usually come in the form of rough knives, small animal horns, usually deer or simple pieces of wood.

As well as the abovementioned instruments, the *puja* also requires other materials (which may be leaves, flowers, water, rice, incense, coloured powders, eggs etc) which are mainly used for dressing the altar and, as they cannot be preserved, these must be replaced for every seance. Many of these objects have more than one use and function: the rice is used as a form of offering, as well as to carry out divinations or even trace designs of supernatural beings on the earthen floor. Likewise, eggs can also be used as offerings for minor beings and, when painted, are used as weapons against malign spirits or even refuges for the *pande*'s soul when it is in danger.

Any description of paraphernalia must bear in mind that all objects and instruments used by the *pande* are polysemic in that during a seance nothing is as it appears to be on the surface. Apart from the drum, which is in any case the only instrument which

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<sup>184</sup> *Mala* means necklace (T505b).

is extremely personalised, all the other objects and paraphernalia necessary for the shamanic seance have many different levels and meanings to them. Actually, it is through these objects and their use that a metalanguage is used which is comprehended both by initiates and to a great extent by the public itself which knows how to interpret and motivate the movements or sounds of the instruments on the basis of the actions of the *pande*.

Semantic 'mutations' can be very sudden: a handful of rice which a few minutes previously had been used as an offering to the divinities, is transformed in the space of a few moments into the figure of a dangerous demon traced out on the earthen floor by the *pande* with the grains of rice. The stick used to sound the *ring* can suddenly transform into what is understood by those present to be a form of large straw which is first immersed in holy water and then introduced into the mouth of the patient, thus becoming the means by which the cure is administered to the patient. An egg which has been painted a particular black and red pattern is recognised by those present as being a boundary beyond which witches cannot go, but when the boundary lines have been quickly and summarily erased it can be used in the dense darkness of the jungle outside the hut as an offering of food to supernatural beings who are not thought to drink blood. The multitude of symbolic and semantic levels of meanings of the objects and the movements made by the *pande*, especially during the dancing, could easily be the subject of another work which it is hoped can be undertaken in the future after new research and studies have been made.

### **The magic flight and journey to the Underworld**

The ability to experiment with outwith the body, thus allowing the soul to fly to the Heavens or travel to the depths of the Underworld is one of the prerogatives of most shamanic religions throughout the world. It further distinguishes the figure of the shaman from that of the possessed, who, even if he could have the experience of the soul travelling outwith the body, would have no recollection of the fact afterwards.

However, when entering a trance involving movement as described in an earlier chapter, the shamans are well versed in the techniques and means needed to reach other cosmic zones to which they travel for various motives, and always remember what happened and what they saw there, then informing the rest of the community in the form of chants and accounts of their experience.

Obviously not everything is revealed to the persons present and many of the events experienced are kept secret by the shaman and make up his personal baggage of knowledge.

The Araucan *machi* described by A. Métraux fall into a deep trance after a serious illness which is initiative in nature and during the trance they are believed to have flown to the sky to obtain all the information necessary for the cure of various illnesses<sup>185</sup>.

When the shaman in the Conibos tribe in Peru has consumed a drink made of *yage* (*Banisteriopsis*) which has hallucinogenic qualities, he falls into a deep form of catalepsy during which it is believed that his soul turns into a bird and flies off into the sky in search of a kidnapped soul or a lost person<sup>186</sup>.

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<sup>185</sup> Métraux, A. 1942, op.cit., p.316.

<sup>186</sup> Harner, M. 1973. *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

The novice Mentawei shaman experiments with magic flights to the Heavens which he does with the help of assistant spirits who come in the form of eagles and take him to the celestial banks in a boat<sup>187</sup>.

These characteristics have been attributed to shamans all over the world who usually put on symbols which are generally ornithological in nature and belong to the magic flight which they are believed to be able to make.

S. M. Shirokogoroff mentions bird-like costumes present in the Yakut where the shaman's clothing consists of the skeleton of a bird made in iron. The Tungus in Transbaikalia use two types of clothing depending on whether the shaman is travelling to the Heavens in which case the costume is very light so as to facilitate flight or to other places (the Underworld ?) for which the more traditional costume made from reindeer skin is used. The Manchurians and Gold shamans in particular appear to be divided into categories of 'great shamans' and 'little shamans'. The former are recognised as having the power to relate to those in the world of the deceased and therefore with the Underworld, while the latter do not have this faculty. The 'little shamans' have a costume which is not complete like that of their more powerful colleagues but has more ornithological references: eagle feathers attached to the shoulders and back and iron hangings in the form of birds, similar to those on the headgear<sup>188</sup>.

Even in Nepal, though this is not the case with the Chepang, many *jhakri* from different groups wear headgear with feathers like, for example, the Magar. Peacock feathers are generally used as part of the ritual costume and in magic, though rather than symbolising the flight itself, these are probably connected to the great powers attributed to them, both in black and white magic.

The magic flight, like the descent into the Underworld, is not only the prerogative of shamans and we must consider the possibility of reciprocal influences of different religions especially in the case of the Himalayas.

Nepal in particular has taken in both Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism, known as Lamaism, as well as the ancient Bon religion.

The experiences of moving outwith the body, conditions of ecstasy, magic flights and journeys in general are no stranger to any of these religions and although it is quite difficult to establish the links and origins of these phenomena we must at least note their existence.

At the time of Vedic India there were already some accounts telling of magic flights which had been made by the ecstatic *muni* who was defined as being a 'horse of the wind'<sup>189</sup> who was able to fly to the Heavens and was linked to the god Rudra who was believed, amongst many other things, to have had great ecstatic powers.

The fifteenth book of the *Atharva Veda*<sup>190</sup> is dedicated in its entirety to the *vrâtya*, who were perhaps ascetics connected with the Shiva cult or perhaps an ancient non-Aryan people and may even have been a group of mystics. The group model for these people may be found in Ekavrâtya, man-god who had many powers. From what one can gauge from this reading, the mysterious *vrâtya* were dressed in black, wore a turban, one white and one black sheepskin on their back and always carried a bow and stick with them which were both shamanic symbols in many parts of Asia. What

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<sup>187</sup> Loeb, E. M. 1929, op.cit., pp.61 - 66.

<sup>188</sup> Shirokogoroff, S. M. 1935, op.cit., p.296.

<sup>189</sup> Rg Veda, X, 136.

<sup>190</sup> For an accurate description see Eliade, M. 1954. *Le Yoga, immortalité et liberté*, Paris: Payot. (Italian Edition 1990. *Lo Yoga, immortalità e libertà*. Florence: pp.106 - 109.)

is most interesting is the fact that during certain sacrificial ceremonies they used a form of swing which was called 'the boat which leads to the Heavens', the girls who danced were 'birds flying in the sky', and the person making the sacrifice was also likened to a winged creature.

Magicians and ascetics were also known to have the ability to make flights and descents. One of the latter was called Gorakhnât, who actually lived around the twelfth century AD and is well known in Nepal because of a myth which tells of the occasion when he was not accorded the proper honours when he sat in meditation on a vase in which he had previously trapped all the clouds and remained there for twelve years, causing a serious drought. On the prayers of the King of Nepal, the saint Matsyendranât went to see Gorakhnât, who had been a pupil of his, and he immediately stood up, thus letting out the clouds and thereupon allowing it to rain<sup>191</sup>. Matsyendranât, who was made the patron divinity of Nepal for his intervention in the matter of the rain, was said to have spread Tantrism throughout this small country. His disciple was said to have been responsible for the expansion of that cult known as *Natha* which, through Yoga, conferred powers of the occult. *Natha* was a very popular religious movement in the twelfth century and many of the cults dedicated to Shiva belonged to it, as did many Tantric and Buddhist cults. Gorakhnât was probably also the founder of Hata Yoga which is centred on the perfect control over the body and its vital energies.

Gorakhnât, who was mythicised to such an extent that it is often difficult to distinguish historical reality from legend, is said to have made various journeys to the Underworld. One of these journeys took place so as to ask the god of the serpents for the magic incense which could be used to cure a woman who was dying, and another to ask Yama, Lord of death, to change the destiny of his guru, Matsyendranât, who was a prisoner at Kadali. In many legends the ascetic can change himself into an animal; he can resuscitate the dead; even create men using horse dung. Gorakhnât also initiated the two sons of his guru and we are told how he killed the two young men in a fit of rage. He disembowelled them and washed out their intestines, and hung the skins on the branch of a tree. The boy's father, Matsyendranât, asked his disciple to forgive them and bring them back to life. The processes of cleaning and purification, death and resurrection are, as we have already seen, typical of Shamanism. Even the disciples of Gorakhnât, though to a lesser degree, were said to have magic qualities, the most important of which was their ability to free themselves into the ethereal<sup>192</sup>.

The presence of all the shamanic motives is obvious, particularly that of the journey beyond the tomb to recuperate a soul by dealing directly with the gods themselves.

Even nowadays, the ascent into the sky is a very common motive throughout India and is symbolised in one of the most popular forms, the rope trick carried out for the most part by fakirs and illusionists. The rope trick is usually carried out in the following fashion: the fakir takes a long rope and throws it up into the air, making it straight and rigid, without allowing it to fall back onto the ground. A young assistant is then asked to climb up to the top of the rope and this feat is accomplished much to the surprise of all present.

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<sup>191</sup> Lévi, S. 1905 - 1908. *Le Népal Etude Historique d'un royaume hindou*. Paris: Ernest Leroux Éditeur: p.352.

<sup>192</sup> Gorakhnât himself is believed to be the author of a text called *Gorksacataka*, which still exists today. For more on the many legends surrounding this figure, see Briggs, G. W. 1938. *Gorakhnât and the Kanphata Yogis*. Calcutta-Oxford and Dasgupta, S. 1946. *Obscure religious cults*. Calcutta. Eliade, M. 1954, op. cit.

Obviously there is only a tenuous link between the above description and Shamanism as, apparently, no trance is used but it can nonetheless be easily compared, especially when done by *yoghin* and ascetics, to certain ascents of trees or poles which symbolise an *axis mundi* typical of many shamanic religions and present in Nepal too, for example in the Magar.

As far as Buddhism is concerned, it must be said that Buddha himself and his followers are often said to be able to move fast in flight and that the *Buddhaghosa Visuddhimagga* describes the power to free oneself into the air like a bird as one of the four magic powers known as *gamana*.

As we have seen so far, the Chepang and Sherpa myths tell of competition between a Tamang lama and Chepang *pande* and between a lama and shaman, both Sherpa. In Nepal even Buddhist monks, the lama, are believed to have that same ability of flight which is probably connected to the ancient Bon-po religion as well as with the even older Tibetan religion which has no name but which preceded that of the Bon<sup>193</sup>. The first mythical king of Tibet is thought to have descended directly from the sky and the Bon priests were known to have the ability to fly on their own drums.

An old legend, very similar to those of the Chepang and Sherpa already mentioned, tells of the competition between Na-ro-bon, a Bon-po priest, and Mi-la-ras-pa, a Buddhist priest, describes how the former flew into the sky on his drum to reach the peak of the sacred mountain Kailasa, land of the divinities<sup>194</sup>. The myth appears to be quite interesting in that, seen together with the other two which were both Nepalese in origin, and the Mongolian ones described by Éveline Lot-Falck, it would indicate a passage of powers from the Bon to Buddhism. In the oldest story it is the Bon-po priest Na-ro-bon who flies up and wins the competition with the exponent of a new religion which was soon to become more dominant. Later, an account was to appear amongst the Sherpa who have Tibetan origins, which was to tell of a duel not between a Bon-po and a Buddhist, but between a lama and a shaman. The Sherpas have different names for the shamans, one of which is *pen-bu* which scholars have identified as being Bon-po<sup>195</sup>. Given that the exponents of the ancient religion and that of the *jhakri* somewhat overlap, the myth would appear to be overturned in that the ability to fly appears now to belong to the lama, the Buddhist priest. The antagonist has not lost his ability, it is just that the lama is able to fly faster. In the Chepang myth the shaman is slower than the Tamang lama but he has greater knowledge and greater power given that he can not only fly but is also able to descend into the Underworld. In all three stories, the protagonists have to reach the land of the gods and in all three stories it is the Buddhist lama who wins the

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<sup>193</sup> For a description of the similarities and differences between Bon and Shamanism, see : Nicoletti, M. 1995. Bon e sciamanismo: studio introduttivo di comparazione dei due fenomeni religiosi. Mastromattei, R. (ed.), op.cit., pp.104 - 164.

For information on the Bon-po religion, see: Snellgrove, D. 1987. *Indo-Tibetan Buddhism*. Boston: Shambhala.

Snellgrove, D. 1967. *The Nine Ways of Bon Excerpts from gZi brjid*. London: K. P.

Kvaerne, P. 1961. *Tibet Bon Religion A Death Ritual of the Tibetan Bon-pos*. Leiden.

<sup>194</sup> Garma, C. C. C. 1977. *The hundred thousand songs of Milarepa* 1. London: Shambhala: pp.220 - 221.

Hoffmann, H. 1943. *La religione Bon tibetana*. Rome.

Hoffmann, H. 1961. *The religions of Tibet*. London: Allen and Unwin.

<sup>195</sup> According to Paul, R. A. 1976, op.cit., in Hitchcock, J. T., & Jones, R. L., op. cit., p.144, the Sherpa now see the ancient Bon religion, which still exists, as being Shamanism. The same author has also written: 1989. *The Sherpas of Nepal in the Tibetan Cultural Context*. Delhi: Motilal Banarsiddas Publishers.

competition. This could actually be interpreted as being the competition that Buddhism has had to face from older religions such as Bon and Shamanism and its partial victory over the latter two religions. In fact in both the Chepang and Sherpa myths there is a division of powers: it is no coincidence that the Sherpa lama actually decides to tear up all of the shaman's written texts<sup>196</sup>, thus creating what would seem from many points of view to be an unsurmountable barrier between the two religions. One of these is monastic, organised and hierarchical where it is mainly the *mantra* and written formulas which form the bridge between man and the divine - Buddhism, the other being much more individualist without any cult areas and most of all without scriptures, as it is the *jhakri* himself who is the 'meeting place' between man and gods.

In the Chepang myth, the division is pushed even further and a real difference is made between the two religions as well as distinguishing between different types of Shamanism on the basis of the outer body experiences and spiritual journeys. The *pande* is different to the lama and from most other *jhakri* and can move freely in all areas of the *patal*; he does not reach the peak of the mountain where the gods reside first as the most important of his divinities actually reside in the Underworld, where only *pande* may venture.

The ways and means by which these journeys are carried out are particularly interesting.

The *jhakri* in many ethnic groups in Nepal are considered to be able to fly to the Heavens and, to a lesser extent, are able to travel into the Underworld. The Thulung Rai<sup>197</sup> shamans tell of flying on their drum: during the *puja* the various phases of the journey are easily distinguished, in that they are symbolised by eight different types of dance which generally imitate the movements of different species of birds. The Limbu<sup>198</sup> identify the drum with the deer which, once the hide has been used for the membrane, also becomes the main means of moving about together with other symbolic animals carved into the grip of the drum such as birds and snakes, thus allowing the shaman access to the Heavens. The Sherpa *jhakri* can move about in both the Heavens and the Underworld though according to Paul many have said that the means used by them have drawn much from Buddhism. There are also women figures present in the Sherpa, called *da lo ma*, or 'women who have returned from the Underworld'. It is believed that when these women go into a deep form of catalepsy and apparent death, they actually descend into the deepest part of the *patal*, thus gaining a profound knowledge and therefore earning great respect from the community<sup>199</sup>. The *da lo ma* do not actually become shamanesses in that this experience only occurs once in their life and is never willingly induced. Tamang Shamanism often uses the image of a horse, especially in different objects present during a *puja*, and the *bombo* calls on his assistant spirit or spirits, called *phamo* in Tamang, before flying to the gates of Heaven, so that they may accompany him and thus guide and protect him on his journey<sup>200</sup>.

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<sup>196</sup> As far as the purported existence of written texts at the time Shamanism originated is concerned, see the interesting Tamang myth reported in Holmberg, D. H. 1989, op.cit., p.149, which tells of two Tamang brothers, one of whom is a lama and the other a *bombo*. The latter decided to burn his texts and eat their ashes thus taking all its knowledge into himself.

<sup>197</sup> See the account by the *jhakri* Baginanda in Allen, N. 1976. Shamanism among the Thulung Rai. Hitchcock, J. T. & Jones, R. L., op.cit., pp.127 - 133.

<sup>198</sup> Jones, R. L. 1976, op.cit., in Hitchcock, J. T. & Jones, R. L., op.cit.

<sup>199</sup> Paul, R. A. 1976, op.cit., in Hitchcock, J. T. & Jones, R. L., op.cit., p.143.

<sup>200</sup> Holmberg, D. H. 1989, op.cit., pp.160 - 162.

We have already seen how some *pande* report that they have been guided to other cosmic worlds by the spirit of the drum, though they never rode the drum, nor has it ever taken on any animal form. Many others have associated the state of trance involving movement with that of a state of dreaming, in that both the conditions involve some form of liberation of the soul from the body. The soul is free to wander both during dreams and during *kamnu*: it goes into the Underworld, up into the Skies and flies to any place on Earth to return to the body when it has completed its mission. If the condition of trance is associated with the condition of dreaming, it must however be emphasised that a dream is private, individual and often unsolicited, at least consciously, by the *pande* in person. On the other hand, the trance involving movement is used directly by the *pande* and, as this takes place publically, it has a social dimension to it. Journeys completed in dreams by novice shamans in the main and those which take place during *puja* share the same mythical baggage and visions which will then be passed on to the other inhabitants of the village only when these occur during nocturnal shamanic seances.

The exclusively nocturnal dimension of the *puja* in which altered states of consciousness, which are the *pande*'s only means of carrying out the magic journey, occur, must, in my opinion, in some way be related to 'dream time' though this is obviously mainly nocturnal.

In the Chepang villages, everyone retires to their habitations after sunset when the first wisps of darkness appear and the inhabitants sleep until sunrise: night is thought to be dangerous because witches and malefic spirits wander the jungles, thirsty for human blood. Night is, however, the time for dreams which allow man to come into direct contact with the divinities. This is why the most important shamanic *puja* can only be held at night. In a way the shamanic trance repeats the moment of dreaming but is more socialised and organised in such a way that it functions as a bridge between man and the divinities, not just for one individual chosen by the gods, but for the whole community.

If it is the divinities and supernatural beings who, for various reasons seek interaction with humans in the course of dreams, the *pande* themselves use the trance to decide on their encounters and disagreements with superior beings and in order to do this, they must travel to the lands of the divinities.

One *pande* told me of an interesting and recurrent dream he had had which is however experienced as a journey of the soul which has been sought after and organised by the gods. Even military helicopters may be seen in dreams. There are many *pande* who have various means of travelling about, not just animal guides but magic means of flying, like the helicopters and aeroplanes which can often be seen flying over the Himalayan peaks during the day. This detail can be said to indicate mutation and modernisation of Chepang Shamanism (and is probably true of other groups too).

It would be a serious mistake to consider that Shamanism was a fossilised collection of beliefs and myths which have been repeated in their original form since the time of their ancestors. The personal and creative dimension of Shamanism means that new elements which are revealed or unveiled to the *pande* in the course of initiatory dreams or trances are being added all the time. Around a century ago the only things flying in the skies were birds and insects, now we have all witnessed aeroplanes and helicopters which are much faster and more powerful than any bird of flight and

which, for those populations who have not yet experienced modern technology, are considered to be much more ‘magic’<sup>201</sup>. This is the account:

‘When I shake during a *puja*, I feel light and even if I am sitting in front of a big fire, I feel cool inside. At the beginning of a *puja* I am like a normal person but when I get to the point, everything changes and I feel as light as a leaf: my body is like a dry leaf and is very cool....I tell my soul to go in different directions, into the *patal* or *akas*...I send my soul with the help of a wind, sometimes with the help of something else, depending on the situation. At times I send it with the sun’s chariot or Indra’s chariot or the chariot of the moon. When I dream the army ( of gods) sometimes comes in a helicopter which rises up into the air and goes to the North. The helicopter takes me to a garden and the soldiers give me fruit, oranges and apples, and then a guard tells me to go back home. Then the army puts me into some sort of vehicle, it could be a lorry, bus or jeep, and as soon as the engine starts, I wake up in my house. All this happened to me in a dream.’<sup>202</sup>

Many *pande* have talked of sending their soul, which is compared to a leaf or butterfly, with a wind both to the Skies and the Underworld. Others, perhaps expressing beliefs which have different origins, maintain they go to the *akas* on the back of a bird which some have identified as being Garuda<sup>203</sup> and others have identified as being a bird of prey and travel to the Underworld on the back of a fish.

‘When I shake, it is not much different from dreaming. I see a sort of darkness, but as soon as I find what I am looking for, for example the cause of an illness, the darkness suddenly becomes light and my body feels very light. I fly into the Sky with Garuda the bird and go down to the *patal* on the back of a fish, which, when it moves, causes earthquakes <sup>204</sup>. There are two fish, one male and one female: Suna-Macha and Kapur-Macha, I only ride on the male one. The bird is called Panchi<sup>205</sup> .....

The bird and fish are much larger than normal animals. The fish lives in the seven oceans of the *patal*. It is accompanied by gods and demons. The bird cannot be seen by man and lives in the snows of the high mountains. The first time I met this bird, I was twelve. I had a dream: I was falling from a high mountain when I saw a lovely fruit tree with oranges. Someone told me to pick them. When I found myself near the tree, I saw a large black snake which wound itself round my body and squeezed tightly. I asked for help and the snake asked me: I remembered the name of Garuda and said, . Immediately after that Garuda arrived and took me up into the seven mountains. He left me there and I began to cry, because I wanted to go back home. Suddenly I saw a Brahmin who asked me I

<sup>201</sup> It is not just the means of moving from one place to another during magic flight which have been modernised, mythology itself often adds new elements. During different *puja*, the Chepang *pande* often ask Tentzin Sherpa, the famous Sherpa guide who led Sir Edmund Hillary and his expedition on its first climb of Mount Everest, for assistance. When he died some years ago, he was immediately made a god and is now seen by the Chepang as one of the divinities of the high mountains, and I therefore presume that the same applies to other groups.

<sup>202</sup> From an interview with Jit Bahadur Praja, Chitwan District, 09:04:1995.

<sup>203</sup> According to Hindu tradition Garuda is the famous god with the beak, wings and talons of a bird of prey and a human body. According to the myth reported in the *Agni Purana*, Garuda is one of the representations of Rudra. He is also often Indra’s steed. In any case Garuda is the symbol of courage and loyalty. He has tremendous strength and is known for his ability to kill snakes and therefore it is him that people turn to if they have been bitten by a poisonous snake.

<sup>204</sup> According to the Chepang, the Earth and Heavens are supported by an enormous fish and a crab which reside in the Underworld and which we shall say more about when dealing with the myth about how the world was created. Let us anticipate here that the Chepang believe that the movement of this fish, which has different names though it generally goes by the name of Urmi, causes earthquakes to occur and that if the fish decided not to support the cosmic pillar any longer, the Earth and Skies would disappear and be destroyed.

<sup>205</sup> Though the *pande* has just confirmed that this is Garuda, he appears to have a personal name for this mythical bird which probably only later also had a Hindu name. Often the *pande* themselves say they have taken Hindu names for gods belonging to their own ethnic group when they have found that various figures correspond to each other.

understood that he was right and I called the bird who came immediately and put me on its back and took me home. Suddenly I woke up and from then on, I began to work with this bird. The bird and the fish are gods and I must make offerings to them.'<sup>206</sup>

'I fly in the Sky with the bird Jatayu<sup>207</sup>. But if there is a storm when I am flying, I have to go into the *patal*, playing with the underground carriage. Also if a witch or some malefic spirit attacks me I must do certain things with the earth which I collect from the *patal*. I fly with Jatayu, fast as the wind and I go into the *patal* with the fish Urmi. Urmi is male: there is also a female fish, but I cannot ride it. When the fish moves the Earth from one shoulder to another, there are earthquakes.'<sup>208</sup>

Some *pande* say that they use different means of transport according to the situation at hand and their destination. In these cases, a mixture of means is used, some more traditional like the animal guides or, as in the following account, bamboo baskets, and others are more modern, such as aeroplanes:

'When a divinity enters me, I am extremely strong: I feel my body to be extremely light, like that of a butterfly. When I begin the *phalaknu*, I am not where you see me: only my body is there, but my soul goes to the *akas* and the *patal*. Without going to these places it would be impossible to cure an illness. I go to the *patal* on a palanquin and I fly to the skies in a bamboo basket. I can also use an aeroplane, a real one, like those we see at Kathmandu. The plane is a gift given to me by the gods. The palanquin is carried by various *naghini*: the white *naghini*, the black *naghini* and the yellow *naghini*. When I am in the plane, I have to stand up because, if I were to fall asleep, I would put my life in great danger. I fly the plane alone, thanks to the power given to me by the gods. This aeroplane is made of silver. If someone disappears from a village and their relatives come to me and tell me his name, I can find him immediately when I use this plane. Apart from that, I can also use an eagle to send my soul to the sky. This eagle sometimes lives to the right and sometimes to the left of the sun and moon. It is not a normal eagle, like those we see on the Earth. Every *pande* has his own means of transport: only those who do not have complete knowledge cannot have one. Sometimes I turn myself into a bird or insect or some other animal to go to the *patal*, but when I am inside the palanquin, I am always in my human form.'<sup>209</sup>

The abovementioned account is particularly important in that it gives a summary of many types of transport used by the *pande* to move about in the different cosmic worlds. The *pande* Dam Maya is well known in most villages throughout Southern Nepal and, as she is particularly powerful, she can use several different vehicles, the last of which is a silver aeroplane given to her by the gods with which she can fly in search of anyone who has disappeared.

Dam Maya also mentions the fact that she can turn herself into an animal, mainly a bird or insect, which proves that the *pande* himself can travel, or rather his soul can, by changing his form and one could even suggest some form of identification between the shaman and his guiding animals.

In many parts of Nepal and this is true for the Chepang in particular, it is believed that the soul, or sometimes one of the souls of the deceased will leave the body during the funeral ceremony in the form of a bird, which is usually the *maina* (T519a, *gracula religiosa*), and then undergo other reincarnations.

During every ceremony, though more so during the trance, the *pande* experiences a situation which is clearly not just similar to that of a dream but could also be likened to a form of death. The body is abandoned on the Earth, while the soul, which sometimes assumes another form, travels to the land of the gods. The difference

<sup>206</sup> From an interview with Narcing Praja, Makwanpur District, 03:09:1995.

<sup>207</sup> *Jatayu* (T206b) is the vulture but this word is also the surname used by Garuda.

<sup>208</sup> From an interview with Tulo Kancha, Makwanpur District, 08:09:1995.

<sup>209</sup> From an interview with Dam Maya Praja, Chitwan District, 13:04:1995.

obviously lies in the ability to return: the *pande* 'is resurrected' and of all humans, only he knows the way to call his soul back.

The trance involving movement, dreams and death, are all three similar experiences which are based on the common ability of the soul to move outwith the body. Though anyone can experience the latter two, they cannot attain the first condition which is believed to be possible only for those who have been given the knowledge which is in turn given by the divinities. The final journey of a deceased soul has no return. The dream represents an intermediate phase between the shamanic trance and death: all men can experience it by making their soul re-enter the body after a dream, but this cannot be carried out at will, and often happens without him being able to recall the memory clearly nor is he able to interpret the dreams as the *pande* can.

There is also another difference between those dreams experienced by a *pande* and those experienced by all other men, who, with the exception of a few cases, maintain that they never have visions of other cosmic regions like the *patal* and *akas*, only of places on Earth which they are more or less familiar with. In general one dreams of things that one has some little knowledge of and we have already seen how the novice *pande*, when being called up by supernatural beings, is different from other men because of the visions he has and the knowledge acquired in particular dreams.

All *pande* agree on the fact that shamanic journeys contain an element of danger, particularly when these take place in the *patal*. The concept of this zone underneath the Earth will be dealt with in greater detail in the following chapter. Let us just mention that the *patal* is seen in two ways: as the promised land where the most worthy ancestors live together with the divinities; and as an extremely dangerous place. Entrance into the *patal* is considered to be particularly arduous and the *pande*'s life is at risk every time.

When talking to me of her travels, the old *pande* Gouri Maya Praja told me that at the entrance of the Underworld there is a large lake over which there is a very frail and shaky bridge<sup>210</sup> which the *pande*'s soul must cross at continual risk to himself of falling into the waters underneath and suffering sudden death. In fact, in the event of this happening the *pande* may still be able to save himself if another powerful and knowledgeable *pande* holds a *puja* in order to save him. However, it is very difficult to find anyone with that knowledge and ability as the second *pande* is also putting his life at enormous risk.

In these rare cases, there is then a double journey with two souls of two different *pande*, one going in search of the other. During this type of *puja*<sup>211</sup>, the body of the *pande* whose soul is in the waters of the Underworld appears to be lying as if he were dead, probably in a state of catalepsy, while the other *pande* is all set to enter a state of altered consciousness to save the soul of his colleague who at that point is considered to be dead by the whole community.

The *pande* presiding over the ceremony then has the opposite role to that of the psychopomp which is usually used during funeral ceremonies during which he accompanies the soul of a dead person to the land of the ancestors. Instead the *pande* goes to retrieve a soul which is already on the threshold of that same place. The *pande* is therefore the only living person to be able to return from what is commonly

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<sup>210</sup> I will not dwell on the well known symbology regarding the bridge, which can be seen during initiatory tests and shamanic journeys in many parts of the world. For more on this topic, see Eliade, M. 1951, op.cit., pp.512 - 516 and, on the concept of the bridge in the Indian area, see Coomaraswamy, L. 1944. *The Perilous Bridge of Welfare*. *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* VIII: pp.196 - 213.

<sup>211</sup> As I have already said, these cases are extremely rare, and I have never managed to attend one of these occasions personally though they were described to me in detail by two *pande*.

considered a state of death and come back from the Underworld, even going against the decision of the gods, thanks to the intervention of one of his colleagues.

The difference between a *pande* and other men is also seen in the ability of the former to control their own trance as well as the fact that the souls of the shamans are able to move quite freely though on every flight to the Heavens or descent into the Underworld they risk being caught in these places by the divinities, thus losing their life on Earth.

A lot has been said about these magic journeys *in spiritu* though little has been said about the dangers incurred by the shamans who themselves talk of this. All *pande* fear for their lives in the time immediately preceding their entrance into a trance involving movement, and are aware of the fact that they may never return from this. In the course of every *puja*, this oscillation between life and death is repeated several times and it is one of the main reasons for the tension of the *pande* and those attending the seance. This tension is only released when the soul returns and is once again reunited with the body thus allowing a return to the world of humans.

### **The Chepang shaman pantheon and their concept of the world: the creation of the world and the first shaman**

As the *pande* themselves emphasise, each one of them have their own pantheon of divinities, many of which can be completely unknown to other *pande*, even within the same village. It therefore becomes particularly difficult to approach this matter and for this reason we shall analyse the analogies between the different Chepang concepts rather than focus on the differences which are so numerous that it would be impossible to examine them all here.

As all shamans are initiated through dreams, it is clear that there is an extremely personal vision of the interpretation and representation of the divinities and supernatural beings.

When asked about their divinities, all the Chepang *pande* stated that it would take 'seven nights and seven days' to name all of them and that in any case this would still not be sufficient as each one of them 'work' with their own personal gods.

The number of beliefs and different conceptions and, to a lesser extent, mythologies act against a common background which shares a vision of the cosmos common to all Chepang and which is similar to that of many other shamanic groups in central and northern Asia.

The cosmos is divided into three parts: the nine celestial levels; the seven Underworld ones<sup>212</sup> and an intermediate level which corresponds to our world. There are divinities, supernatural spirits and demons in all three cosmic zones.

We have already mentioned the principally chthonious character of Chepang Shamanism which can be explained by its mythology and religious beliefs which see the nine Heavens rather than the Underworlds as being the source of death and destruction. In fact, the ninth Heaven is where Yama-rajā, the lord of death in Hindu tradition, resides, though the Hindus themselves usually believe him to reside in the Underworld. For the Chepang, Yama is the one who, together with the goddess Babi Ama or Kali Ama, decides on the destiny of each individual a few days after birth. It is said that when Yama sets the date of the new born child's death Babi Ama cries bitterly as she is in a way forced to witness the end of a human life from its very birth.

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<sup>212</sup> On numbers and their religious implications for different peoples, see Schmidt, W. 1952. *Der Ursprung der Gottesidee* XI. Munster.

Yama is responsible for deciding on when an individual will die as well as being responsible for sending illnesses by means of the planets, called *graha* (T151b) in Nepali, which exist in the eight celestial levels underneath his. The lord of death may also send the two planets called Niu, a female planet, and Kal<sup>213</sup> to Earth to kidnap a soul. If the planet Kal is chosen for this task, this means certain death for the person chosen whose soul will then be kidnapped by the planet and no *pande* will ever be able to intervene to help.

The planet Niu works in a different way: once Niu catches a human soul, she takes it to Yama who locks it away in a place which is protected by seven doors which in turn have seven heavy locks. The Chepang believe there are seven Niu and seven Kal and the soul which has been imprisoned goes from one Niu to the other and then to the seven Kal who will then give him over to Yama. In the meantime the person who has been chosen will become ill and his condition will get worse and worse as his soul moves from one planet to the next. Before the soul gets to the Kal, it may still be possible for a *pande* to intervene and, by making offerings to Yama, cure the patient and retrieve his soul.

The Kal and Niu have another two planets at their service who function as ‘soul hunters’ whenever the former cannot themselves go down to Earth for one reason or another. These *graha* are called Rau and Ketu<sup>214</sup>.

Sometimes the planets become invisible on their visits to Earth, but it is also believed that they take on human form, particularly that of a child or young boy or virgin who is completely nude and has long grey hair. If they go into a house where someone is sick, this will mean certain death for the latter. If, however, they pause at the entrance and then go away again, the patient will not die.

There are many other divinities in the Heavens apart from Yama and his planets, though these do not seem to have any particular significance for the Chepang and many of these have Hindu names, the most important of which is Indra who is often invoked but hardly ever given offerings.

There are a great number of supernatural beings who live and act on the Earth, mainly in the high mountains or inside stones or running water, sometimes even in the jungles or forests. These are often local divinities whose names and attributes vary from one area to another. Amongst these there are two extremely important figures who are common to and recurrent in all the Chepang groups I met. These are the *ban-jhakri*, the forest shamans we mentioned earlier involved in initiation who are also present in the mythology of other ethnic groups and are responsible for the training of most neophyte shamans throughout Nepal, and Namrung, another god, who must until a few years ago, have been the most important god for all Chepang.

Namrung is the god of Hunting, and the only supernatural being belonging to the ethnic group who is known and revered by all *pande* and Chepang in general. Up until hunting was banned by a royal edict, the Chepang, who were considered to be the best hunters in the country, would beat through the jungles and forest almost every day armed with bows and arrows in their search for wild animals. Each expedition had to be guided by a *pande* who, before the hunt started, would make offerings to Namrung, and ask him to send out the wild game. Namrung was and still is recognised today as being lord of all wild animals who he can hide at will if for some reason he is angry at humans, or even hunt himself for other divinities living at other cosmic levels. According to Chepang myths, Namrung was created after the

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<sup>213</sup> The term *kal* is used in Nepali to refer to time, death and destiny (T90a).

<sup>214</sup> The term *ketu* is also used to describe comets (T104a).

world when many of the other gods already existed and was created in order to be able to hunt for them. He is described as having human features, he may, in very rare cases, be seen by *pande* but not by common men. He lives in the dense forest, is semi-nude, wears several bells of different sizes on his body and is always carrying his bow and arrow. In many accounts he is always accompanied by a hunting dog and is assisted by many other *shikari* (T604b) or hunters in the form of wolves: some are wolf-spirits, others real animals.

The abovementioned description could, with the exception of course of the packs of wolves accompanying the god, fit that of any Chepang at the time when they were still hunting. B.H. Hodgson<sup>215</sup>, who was the first to give a description of these people, noted that the Chepang men always wore a loincloth and never went anywhere without their bows and arrows which they wore around their neck. They also used hunting dogs to hunt the game, a part of which, as soon as it was caught, was offered to Namrung by the *pande* who had the task of cutting open the game and taking out its heart and liver which were used as an offering together with the ears and blood of the animal.

In fact the figure of Namrung is losing its importance as hunting activities have now been banned and this is a source of worry for many *pande* who retain that the divinity will be angered and could then call down illnesses and various types of calamities on the people as he no longer receives the respect he was once paid. In any case, Namrung's name is mentioned in almost all the invocations and chants for requests for help which are aimed at the divinities during shamanic seances.

Some Chepang groups who live in areas which are particularly inaccessible, especially in the area of Kakkara still continue to hunt, uncaring of the ban, and therefore have closer ties with this god than those groups in other areas which are less geographically isolated.

Irrespective of whether they continue to hunt or not, all Chepang are believed to hold at least one ceremony a year in honour of Namrung during which ceremony a hunt takes place and at least one animal must be caught<sup>216</sup>.

As is often the case with the Chepang, this god may have one or many figures at the same time. Much is said about there being one or many Namrung (usually one hundred), who are brothers and generally divided into two groups, the Gorkha Namrung Shikari and the Namrung Pachabaiya Shikari. The two differ in that the former - whose mythological origins are in the District of Gorkha - require offerings of blood before the hunt begins and this is then followed by an offering of blood and the entrails of the animals caught. The Namrung Pachabaiya Shikari, who are also hunters, do not feed on blood and only accept offerings of milk or, as this is often not always available, a sort of substitute made from a mixture of water and flour.

Namrung is believed to be a powerful and active divinity during any type of *puja*, and the *pande* believe he can control malefic spirits and their attacks on man. Namrung is also somewhat irascible and feared in that, if he has been offended, he

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<sup>215</sup> Hodgson, B. H. 1857. op.cit.

<sup>216</sup> This is the Namrung-*puja* ceremony which usually takes place between the months of November and December. After many years of vain attempts, I finally managed to attend this in December 1995. The Namrung-*puja*, which will be described in more detail in the chapter on the latter and the Chhonam Festival, is, though celebrated by many *pande*, kept secret so as to prevent the authorities from finding out about the hunt which would create a lot of problems for the Chepang. As they are no longer allowed to have bows and arrows, the men hunt with spears they themselves have made. Only the *pande* has a symbolic bow and arrow made of bamboo which are then offered up to the god Namrung.

can send serious illnesses and calamities in the form of epidemics or, as he is the lord of all wild animals, in the form of wild beasts such as tigers who are responsible for killing the few domestic animals in the Chepang village.

Namrung is one of the divinities who the Chepang have not given a Hindu name to and, in contrast to other beings like Yama raja, Indra and Kali, is considered to belong to the ethnic group. It is said that no-one else outside the Chepang can relate to him or even know of his existence.

In fact, it must be noted here that the Hindu divinities known and respected by the Chepang who are often actually supernatural beings who have little to do with Hindu mythology or beliefs, actually reside in the nine Heavens, the land of the lord of death. On the other hand, those divinities who have maintained the characteristics and names of the Chepang, like Namrung, actually live on the Earth or in the seven levels of the Underworld, from which all Chepang are supposedly descended.

Dualist interpretations of dubious value regarding the Siberian area would have it that shamans who can relate to the Underworld are individuals who tend to practise black magic while those shamans who travel more often to the Heavens are often described as being white. First of all, as we have already stated, it is not possible to make a distinction between white and black shamans in that this would imply the application of concepts and theories which are not the same as those of the different ethnic groups within which each divinity generally has two and sometimes many more different aspects. The most important Chepang divinities can thus be both benefic and malefic or even indifferent according to the different cases, in turn regulating the behaviour and actions of the *pande*.

It is true that Chepang mythology and beliefs appear to be inverted in respect to those of the majority of the other ethnic groups in the country who see the Heavens as being an idyllic place in which it is easier to find allied divinities and supernatural beings. However, it is because of this very difference that Chepang Shamanism cannot be termed black Shamanism in that the more benefic divinities and those closest to the world of humans reside in the *patal*, which is described by the *pande* as being a promised land, with many rivers, lakes, forests, jungles, splendid palaces and temples.

In the *patal*, the souls of the more honourable deceased can still live, free from illness or Earthly misfortunes and as they are in charge of the forests, they can hunt every day.

The *pande* describe the *patal* as being a happy period in which, not long after the creation of the world, all men and not just *pande*, could talk directly with the divinities and travel to all the cosmic areas. This recollection of a mythological golden age can be seen in the recollection of the time when the Chepang were almost kings of the forest and still led a nomadic existence.

The *patal*, or at least some parts of it, reflects an idyllic picture which is probably not at all realistic of the living conditions of the group up until about twenty years ago when these were so brusquely interrupted for reasons we have already mentioned.

Although there are divinities and supernatural beings which are revered and thought to be extremely powerful in the Heavens, the *akas* is generally considered to be far from humans. Certain aspects of the Chepang religion could be compared to the Yakut religion<sup>217</sup> which believes there are two categories of divinities called high *bis* and low *bis*, the former being benefic celestial beings though they are very far away

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<sup>217</sup> Sieroszewski, W. 1902. Du shamanisme d'après les croyances des Yakoutes. *Revue de l'histoire des religions* XLVI.

from the world of humans and completely disinterested in it. The Underworld *bis* include divinities and spirits who could even be malefic but who are the only ones to have anything to do with humans who they are related to and similar to whom they behave.

The Chepang believe that everything, including themselves, originated in the *patal* and that Earth and Heaven exist because of this and in particular thanks to the cosmic pillar which exists inside it. The names of the gods who created the world of humans vary according to local beliefs and mythology. The following account of how the world, the first man and demons were created would seem to be the most organised:

‘In the *patal* there were two sets of brothers, Batisé and Tiwasé, and Kesardin and Lawardin. Above the *patal* ( in the Heavens) there were two sisters, both virgins, who had never seen anyone or anything apart from themselves. The oldest of the two sisters was Sobotí and the youngest Devklí. All these divinities existed before man had been created, but one day the first man was born in the *patal*. The gods discussed this new arrival in great detail and some of them said,

Batisé and Tiwasé then said, you give us one hundred *muri*<sup>218</sup> of cooked rice, one hundred *muri* of lentils and one hundred goats, we will then be able to create a land where these humans will live so that they do not dirty our world. Let us hope they will pay us back one day !. The two greedy brothers were given the hundred goats, rice and lentils as they had requested but, full of food, they tried in vain for seven days to push this world out of the *patal*, to no effect.

The frog Thakurdin, who had seen these developments, was very sad because he was afraid these men would contaminate him. Someone asked the frog to take a message to the two sisters of the *akas* and Thakurdin leapt up to the nine celestial levels to tell the two sisters of the brothers’ failure. As the frog knew that Sobotí and Devklí could not look on anyone’s face, he hid in the fountain where they were going to wash and began to move the waters. When the sisters arrived, they said, The two sisters then said,

Thakurdin leapt out in front of Sobotí and Devklí and they said, and Thakurdin replied, «I am not here because of a personal problem. I have seen that the brothers were not able to do anything in seven days. There is a new arrival in the house of the gods, but the brothers cannot create a place for him; if he had a place to stay, we could live in clean places, but the brothers have done nothing for seven days. This is why I have come here, to persuade you to help with this problem which is not just my problem.»

One of the sisters said, The frog went back down and saw that Batisé and Tiwasé were still eating and talking about the creation of the world. Thakurdin told the other gods, . The gods gathered round the frog and asked him what he had seen and he told them everything. The others then felt they had the support of the two virgins and decided to send their army to bring them down to the *patal*.

Kesardin, Lawardin and Thakardin were not part of the army which soon reached the Ninth Heaven. The two sisters asked them, and the army replied, Sobotí and Devklí refused to go down with the army and said, . The two sisters dressed themselves in white and then, quicker than the wind, flew down to the *patal* and arrived before the army.

When they arrived everything became dark<sup>219</sup>, the frog was sitting there and they began to kick him, saying, The frog closed his eyes as he was extremely shocked and the other gods said, the frog closes his eyes there will be no more sun in the *patal*: if you kill poor Thakurdin, we will not create a world. Please let him live ! So one of the sisters took the frog and blew upon him and brought him back to life. They then told him to go and sit in a corner.

From the moment they had arrived in the *patal* the two sisters had kept their eyes closed and, without opening them, they asked, The gods said, . Even the two lazy brothers took part in the discussion. The sisters again ordered Thakurdin to close his eyes and make the sun disappear. Even today, when the frogs close their eyes the sun disappears.

When it was completely dark, Sobotí and Devklí undressed to their underclothes and with their pinkies extracted a large part of the pillar that was in the Underworld and threw it up high. A strange snapping sound was heard and it was said that there must be something underneath the pillar. They

<sup>218</sup> This is actually a measurement of weight. One *muri* is equivalent to about one hundred and sixty pounds (T514b).

<sup>219</sup> Darkness and the refusal to travel to the Underworld in the company of the gods’ army, can be explained by the fact that the two sisters were not allowed to look upon any faces.

discovered that it was a crab: the pillar had fallen on its back and that is why crabs still have wounds on their backs to this day. One of the sisters ordered the frog to open his eyes and then told everyone to look up. Everyone saw the pillar in the air. In the *patal* there was a large cow <sup>220</sup> called Lendemuri. The sisters were just about to kill it, but the two greedy brothers said, The two sisters said,

All the gods begged the sisters to let the brothers kill the animal and they accepted, on condition that the sacrifice were to take place in their presence and in one fell swoop. Batisé and Tiwasé asked for another one hundred *muri* of rice, one hundred *muri* of lentils and one hundred goats. The sisters gave them a knife which weighed two hundred kilos with which to kill the cow. The brothers found it very difficult to lift the knife and it took them three attempts to kill Lendemuri.

After the first blow the cow groaned painfully and looked at the *patal*. After the second blow it looked at the world in between. The sisters were very sad and told the brothers, Demons had never existed before then. The blood of the sacrificed cow was put on to the pillar; the larger bones became mountains and rocks while the smaller bones became hills and low mountains; and the skin became the Earth. The two sisters ordered the human,

However, there was no sun in the world of humans because the sun was still in the *patal* and so there were great problems and the humans were dying of hunger. There was a little bird called Chiperkala<sup>221</sup> sitting in a corner, starving and cold in the darkness. Chiperkala told the humans, And so she did. Once she arrived there, she began to sing the following song in her beautiful voice:

*the patal cannot bear my weight,  
only a branch which is as tiny as a needle can bear my weight.  
My breast is strong and full,  
my face fascinating and seductive,  
Hey, hey, my heart and life are with you!  
Come up!»*

The sun was very impressed with Chiperkala's wonderful song. Chiperkala was also his sister-in-law, and he accepted to follow her up to the Earth if she would continue to sing. Before leaving the sun told Chiperkala that once he came up to the Earth she would have to take him back down with her to the *patal*. Chiperkala promised but as she was very hungry, once she got back to the world of humans, she went in search of food and then fell asleep and forgot her promise.

The sun began to complain and then Thakurdin arrived and heard his sad story. The frog said, This is how night and day were created. From that moment onwards the world had the sun, but there are also demons in the *patal* and *akas* which can create problems and devour us.

The first man who was created in the *patal* was a boy and all the offerings we make in the Chhonam Festival are mainly for him. But this is not the story of a human, this is what happened when the Universe was created.<sup>222</sup>

The cosmic pillar which holds up the world of humans and the Heavens is borne by both the mythical crab<sup>223</sup> and a large fish (usually called Urmi or Rou) which many *pande* say they use to go down into the Underworld.

The importance of animals linked to the world of water like frogs and crabs can be explained by the fact that both the *patal* and the *akas* are described as being worlds which consist of many streams, rivers and lakes. The two celestial sisters, Sobotí and Devklí, are actually aquatic divinities as they come from a great river in the *akas*.

Not all *pande* know this myth but, in any case, everyone agrees that the world and mankind have their origins in the *patal*.

When the world had been created, the two sisters are thought to have gone straight back to the *akas*, showing no interest in anything to do with humans. In the same way, the two lazy brothers, Batisé and Tiwasé, and the other two brothers who appear

<sup>220</sup> Some versions mention a cow, others an ox called Lindyan-Marisha.

<sup>221</sup> Chiperkala is a female bird.

<sup>222</sup> This long myth was told by Krishora Devi Praja in November 1991 and details were added during later expeditions.

<sup>223</sup> After this myth, many Chepang never eat river crabs, neither do they eat frogs who no-one is allowed to harm as a sign of respect for Thakurdin.

to be of secondary importance in the myth, Kesardin and Lawardin, are believed never to have intervened in the world of humans, which was created because of their fear that the first man born in the *patal* would have contaminated the land of the gods by urinating, spitting and defecating which are all activities thought to be exclusive to humans. The world was not created by the gods because of their desire to offer the new humans a place to live which would be linked to that of the gods, but because of an oversight of the gods themselves who had repented having created a being which could potentially disturb their peace and quiet and they immediately attempted to remediate this.

It would seem to be logical that once they had achieved their objective, the gods would show no more interest in the affairs of the human world and return to their peaceful and idyllic existence, giving other divine and supernatural beings the task of maintaining relations with humans who would only be allowed to return to live in the *patal* if they had lived a perfect life and this only after they had died, which in itself marks the end of their earthly life.

This is why these six divinities, Sobotí, Devklí, Batisé, Tiwasé, Kesardin and Lawardin, who were those more involved in the creation of the world, are mainly disinterested in the affairs of humans and, because they do not have much influence on humans, they are not usually mentioned in the chants and invocations of Chepang *pande* and do not usually feature in the many shamanic seances. The sun, however, despite the fact that it did not want to, had to agree to spend part of its time in the world of humans, and is often invoked as a powerful and active divinity. Even if it does not appear to be very involved in the affairs of humans, it is in any case able to grant the frequent requests for help made to it by the *pande*.

During the Chhonam Festival which is only held once a year, the *pande* honour these divinities by making offerings taken from the first of their crops.

Though it must be pointed out that there are great variations in the beliefs and mythology of the Chepang, many believe the two sisters who live in the Heavens and the two lazy brothers in the *patal* to be primordial gods who created themselves from nothing and who then created all the other divinities, beginning with the two brothers of Batisé and Tiwasé, Kesardin and Lawardin.

The gods who created the world would appear to have detached themselves from the affairs of humans and their world which they never travel to unlike the many other divinities invoked during the course of shamanic seances. The only figure which links these divinities and humans is that of the *pande*, the only living person who can go into the Underworld and therefore make offerings to these beings in the course of the Chhonam Festival. Offerings from the first harvest of the year must be made despite these divinities' disinterest for the world of humans for two reasons. Firstly as it was Batisé and Tiwasé's desire that men should remember them; and secondly because all types of vegetables, in particular rice which has not yet been processed, are used as offerings during Chhonam as these are considered to belong to the *patal* in that their roots penetrate into it. Pulling plants up from their roots, which happens when vegetables are collected for food, is seen as a sort of theft by the gods who would consider it such if humans were not to pay their respects to them at least by making offerings from the first harvest of the season. The myth also explains how demons were created from the first moans of the sacrificial cow (or ox in some cases) which is also considered to be divine and whose bones and hide become the primary materials used to construct the Earth.

Sounds are closely associated with demons and all forms of malefic spirits in general. According to the Chepang, the latter are the products of pain and it is for this

very reason that they continue to cause suffering. According to a different Chepang myth, demons were created after the world and the first human being had been created and this is narrated in an account of an incident which happened involving two men, father-in-law and son-in-law.

One day these two men decided to cut off the head of the only demon on the Earth at that time. They were to do this before the cock crowed and before the demon managed to get over a chain of mountains. The father-in-law and son-in-law knew that if the demon were to get over the tops of the mountains, it would have begun to produce all sorts of sounds and shouts which would in turn have created other demons. After a long and tiring chase, the son-in-law managed to cut off the demon's head though not before the latter, like the cow Lendemuri, had moaned in pain. It was this moaning which escaped over the mountains and created the other malefic beings though, fortunately, the sun had then begun to rise and when the cock crowed this cancelled out the sound uttered by the demon.

According to the *pande*, it was after this battle between the different sounds which was won by the sound of the cock crowing, that the cock then became one of the most important animals in sacrifices and it is used to pacify both certain divinities as well as many malefic beings. The morning cock's crow which is heard every day at daybreak symbolises victory over the demons and, according to the Chepang, this is expressed in the following terms, '*I stop the sound of the demons and become a resting place for them*', in that it is believed that many demons do not act during daylight.

There is perhaps also another explanation, as well as that already given, which provides a link between shamanic time and that of dreams, the fact that *puja* must be held at night after which many malefic spirits who have caused human suffering become dormant, thus preventing the *pande* from intervening in their actions.

The Chepang are not the only ones to believe that demons are created from pain: there is a particularly interesting Yakut myth which recounts that demons were created from the suffering and the body of the first shaman. In this account, the first shaman was called An-Argyl-Oyum and he was able to produce great miracles and bring back people from the dead. News of his activities reached the god Ai-Toyen who then sent for him and asked him the name of the god in whose name these miracles were being carried out and, which is even more surprising, if he believed in him. The shaman replied that he did not believe in god and that it was his own power which allowed him to carry out the miracles. Ai-Toyen was angry at the arrogance of the shaman and ordered that he should be burnt alive: when the flames began to burn his body, it fell into pieces and everyone could see it was made of different reptiles. A frog managed to escape from the flames and fled up a high mountain and created the demons<sup>224</sup>.

In any case, demons are created from some sort of killing and, especially in Chepang myths, from the pain felt by the victim shortly before death. It is either the pained lowing of the cow or the moan uttered by the dying demon which creates malefic supernatural beings who are born of and therefore create pain.

It is believed that demons were created by gods to maintain an equilibrium between men. In the words of the wise *pande*, Tulo Kancha, who recounted the previous myth which told of the cock's crow and how it cancelled out the shouts of pain uttered by the demon which was killed by the two men:

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<sup>224</sup> Lewitzky, A. 1957. Mythes et Rites du Chamanisme. *Diogéne* 17: p.90.

‘...The gods created demons to maintain an equilibrium in the world, otherwise men would have gone on reproducing themselves without end. Even those insects which sting or bite, like mosquitos, bloodsuckers or flies, are demons who have taken on another form. Horseflies, for example, were created by the blood of the gods. Demons are a form of game invented by the gods.’<sup>225</sup>

Shamans were created at the same time in order to fight the demons and witches. There are no single myths recounting the creation of the first *pande* which many believe to have been the *ban-jhakri*, the spirit-shaman and shaman-divinity of the forest, who was to be responsible for initiation.

There is a myth, best known in the district of Chitwan, which credits Shiva with having created the first *pande*. This is particularly interesting, also because it figures Hindu divinities, Shiva and his wife Parvati, though it has nothing or very little in common with Hindu tradition itself. According to the latter, the beautiful Parvati is the symbol of purity, loyalty, wifely devotion and total dedication to her husband. The Chepang myth sees Parvati as the first witch and responsible for causing her son to fall seriously ill:

‘One day the son of Shiva and Parvati was seriously ill: his father could not cure him and so he decided to create a *jhakri*. He made a figure of gold and tried to give it life, saying, but nothing happened. He made another figure out of silver, but this did not work either. He made another attempt with a figure of iron, and then of copper, but these did not work either. In the end Shiva found some ashes and chicken excrement and mixed them together and said, . The figure came to life and began to speak, this was the first *jhakri*.

Shiva asked him to cure his son and the *pande*<sup>226</sup> sent for the midwife that had brought him into the world as he thought she might have been a witch. The midwife said that the mother was the witch. The *pande* understood that the woman was right and sent an arrow (magic) to wound Parvati’s eyes though she managed to fend off the attack. All those witches who dance nude to the music of the demons at night while making offerings of lamps to the four cardinal points are the followers of Parvati, while the *pande* are followers of her husband, Shiva.

Ever since that moment, it has been very difficult for *pande* to uncover witches.....it requires a lot of effort on their behalf. When Parvati died, it was very difficult to dispose of her body which remained there for a long time before it decomposed without even giving off a bad smell. Shiva had to create flies in order to be able to dispose of it. The flies came and began to eat the corpse when decomposition had started. A part of the body fell to the ground and the blood of Parvati created those gods who live on the Earth and demand blood during sacrifices.’<sup>227</sup>

Shiva is perhaps the only Hindu divinity who the *pande* turn to constantly with requests for help and protection and, according to some, he is also the most important protector of the souls of the drum and the *pande* themselves during their ecstatic travels.

Shiva is certainly an ancient divinity who precedes the Hindu religion itself and has many characteristics which could fit a proto-shamanic figure and for this reason he is respected by all the *jhakri* in Nepal and known by the name Mahadev or great god. In the abovementioned myth, Shiva created the *pande* who one supposes must have had different origins from other human beings. The god does not manage to instill life in the precious metals, gold and silver, nor in iron or copper and the *pande* is eventually created from a mixture of ashes and chicken excrement which are supposedly useless elements, regarded as refuse, but which take on great symbolic value. The *pande* and more generally the *jhakri*, do not in fact use any precious metal or in fact material of any value in their ceremonies, they do not have temples or images of any sort. Fire

<sup>225</sup> From an interview with Tulo Kancha, Makwanpur District, 16:09:1994.

<sup>226</sup> The shaman who recounted this myth then began to use the term *pande* instead of *jhakri*.

<sup>227</sup> From an interview with Narcing Praja, Makwanpur District, 03:09:1994.

and sacrificial animals, usually chickens and cockerels, are the two elements which are used during all forms of shamanic *puja*.

Many *pande* have the ability to control fire and are the only ones who can make sacrifices to the divinities if it is necessary to transfer negative elements or illnesses from a human to a sacrificial animal. In the course of shamanic seances, the *pande*, who are often in a trance-like state, will swallow burning wicks and live coals and may even walk barefoot on fire so as to prove their strength to malefic spirits. By swallowing live coals, the *pande* believe they can thus incorporate within themselves the magic weapon of fire, which has both destructive and purificatory powers. We have already examined the significance of cockerels, hens and chickens in the myth describing how demons were created from the groan their predecessor emitted which was cancelled out by the morning cock's crow. The fact that the *pande* are supposed to have originated from chicken excrement must therefore be seen in the light of the characteristics ascribed to this bird in that it was able to stop the demons and in that the *pande* is in a certain sense offering a part of himself as sacrifice during the *puja* in the knowledge that he may lose his soul and therefore his life in order to find the lost or kidnapped soul of a patient.

We have also seen how the Yakut myth tells of the fact that the shaman's body was eventually composed of ignoble elements such as reptiles, one of which was the frog who actually managed to escape and create the demons.

The fact that the first witch is personified in the figure of Parvati could be said to reflect Chepang beliefs in that the wives of *pande* are often witches. Every union of two elements has the two aspects and opposites necessary to each other, negative and positive, life and death. Like Parvati, the *ban-jhokrini*, also called the *ban-boksi*, is a dangerous witch whose husband must keep a tight rein on her all the time so as to ensure she does not devour his neophyte shamans.

The difference between the latter and Hindu traditions and beliefs is clear, especially when looking at the figure of Parvati who appears as a malefic and dangerous witch who can even protect herself from the magic arrows sent by the *pande* created by Shiva. She is the spiritual guide of all human witches who must turn to her during nocturnal dances and witches' sabbaths.

In contrast to Hindu tradition, the Chepang myth affirms the death of Parvati though it does not indicate the reasons for this. Death confirms the intrinsic wickedness of this goddess whose body takes a long time to decompose, thus obliging her husband Shiva to create the fastidious flies. Various *pande* have confirmed that these, and other insects which are dangerous for men, are also demons. Blood which came from a part of Parvati's body which fell on the ground when it was being dismembered by the flies gave form to all those gods who live on the Earth and who demand blood during sacrifices, thus forcing humans to kill animals for sacrificial and alimentary use, though these are still considered in part to be blows in that they cause other living beings pain.

The Chepang could also believe that all men are malefic beings. The *pande* Narcing Praja, when talking about the myth about Shiva and Parvati, says:

'The *pande* explained to Shiva that all women are witches and all men wizards. The difference is that some individuals are active which depends on their awareness and knowledge. Men are demons: they kill animals and eat their meat.....they are demons and create other demons.'

Besides the divinities belonging to the ethnic group which reside on the Earth or in the *patal*, like Namrung, Batisé, Tiwasé, Lowardin, Thakurdin, Sobotí, Devklí and

many others, and others which have Hindu names and are often attributed Hindu features, like Yama raja, Indra, Shiva, Parvati, the goddess of Earth Bhumi, the god of Sundays, Aitabare etc, the Chepang also give great importance to the sun, moon, stars, clouds and various other atmospheric phenomena, most important of all being the rainbow.

The sun and moon, called Nyem and Lâ in Chepang, are seen as two sister divinities<sup>228</sup>: the sun is the older sister and it is believed that the range of her rays covers the entire surface of the Earth. The moon is the younger sister and is less powerful though very important for the *pande* who carry out most of their ceremonies at night, often according to different phases of the moon. Both sun and moon are also, as we have already noted in the final part of the myth about the creation of the world, powerful divinities belonging to the *patal* which is where they originated. It was only because of the bird Chiperkala and her beautiful song that the sun decided to come up into the sky to bring light to the Earth and her sister the moon was forced to follow her, as the two were 'as close as the blades of the mill'<sup>229</sup> which follow on from each other without ever meeting.

Both Nyem and Lâ prefer to stay in their homeland, the *patal*, where they live in a pond of fire and a pond of milk respectively and resent the fact that they have to go up to Earth every day. The two sisters help the *pande* whenever they are asked for help but otherwise are not particularly interested in the affairs of humans and are of those few divinities who are not believed to be responsible for any type of illness or calamity.

The stars are believed to be gods or goddesses who are much bigger than the sun and moon, but less powerful. In some versions, the stars are smaller divinities in the form of stones who populate the celestial level closer to Earth which is likened to a dense jungle. Their light is supposed to come from the fact that the other, more powerful divinities in the sky put a light on each one of these stones so as to illuminate the dense jungle at night in order that they might see where they are going. Again, the stars do not seem to care about the human race even though some of them are considered to be responsible for causing eye infections, especially in children.

The clouds, especially monsoon clouds which are full of rain, are considered to be divinities belonging to the Heavens and command great respect. The gods of the clouds are obviously responsible for rain and storms as well as floods, which are frequent and dangerous in the monsoon season, and it is believed that these are sent by the gods when they are angry with the humans.

The *pande* are believed to be able to control these and other atmospheric phenomena, but no *pande* would ever agree to try and stop the rain, however violent it may be, in that it would be considered to be a grave sin and would then bring on long periods of drought. When rainfall and storms are too heavy and begin to damage crops, the *pande*, rather than stop them, will try to get them to move towards the mountains, away from the villages and crops. The flight of the gods of the clouds, urged on by the wind, has been compared to that taken by the souls of the *pande* on their way to the Heavens. However, clouds are never considered to be a means of transport in that it is believed that, with the exception of the rain, they have nothing to do with humans whatsoever.

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<sup>228</sup> Some *pande*, particularly in the district of Dhading, consider the sun to be a male divinity, while the moon is generally, with a few exceptions, held to be a female one. The version where the sun and moon are considered to be two sisters is more common and better known in the districts of Chitwan and Makwanpur.

<sup>229</sup> This expression is used by many *pande*.

The rainbow divinity, who is called Indreni as she is believed to be the wife of the god Indra, should really be dealt with in a separate section. The *pande* believe Indreni to be a particularly important goddess as her colours span the sky and the ends of the rainbow, which are seen to be the mouth and feet respectively, go right down into the Underworld. The *pande* believe it is only the goddess's body which comes up into the sky and that her soul lives permanently in the *patal*. Indreni is a beautiful goddess who is not really interested in the affairs of humans but is always accompanied by a servant called Sarkini or Chattrak<sup>230</sup>, a dangerous demon.

According to the myth, one day, Chattrak, who was both ugly and clumsy, was sent for water by her parents. Chattrak flew over a river and saw the reflection of the beautiful Indreni. She believed this reflection to be her own and, pleased at her own reflection said out loud that such beauty could not possibly have been created to carry out such humble tasks and promptly threw the container she had been given to fill with water into the river. Indreni realised Chattrak's mistake and laughed uproariously at this. When Chattrak saw the reflection she realised her mistake and from that day onwards became Indreni's servant and carried out the most humble and humiliating of tasks for her. Chattrak's jealousy, however, made her become an extremely dangerous demon, one of the most feared by the Chepang. She is believed to be thirsty for human blood and is also believed to cause serious illnesses, especially during the monsoon season when rainbows are more frequent<sup>231</sup>.

Obviously we have only looked at a few divinities and supernatural beings which are known to the *pande* and most Chepang here. These are the most important and best known in almost all Chepang groups observed. None of the divinities had exclusively benefic or malefic features: they all have different aspects and can all be the font of worries and illnesses as well as prosperity and fortune.

The variable behaviour of supernatural beings is not always caused by offences committed by humans, and is often difficult to understand, sacrifices and offerings generally being the only way to re-establish some form of order.

In any case, the *pande* are the only people in the community who can deal with supernatural beings and even battle against them, which means that one of their functions is to maintain order, which they are generally always able to restore, even after serious crises.

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<sup>230</sup> It is sometimes, though rarely, possible to see part of a second rainbow in the sky over the first and the Chepang believe this is Chattrak.

<sup>231</sup> In the chapter on the figure of the *pande* as a therapist we shall be examining a *puja* which is carried out for therapeutic purposes in which the divinity responsible for causing the illness of a young woman was recognised by the *pande* as being Chattrak.

## **The social function of the *pande* within the community**

Up to now we have seen how the *pande* is unique within the Chepang community. He covers many different functions which are all necessary for the community in which he lives. During everyday activities, he or she may be an ordinary person who does his or her share of the daily tasks to be done, be they domestic or agricultural, and during the night or one of the rituals or seances we have already examined, he or she removes him or herself from the world of humans and takes on other connotations not unlike those of a hero.

He or she walks the path between worlds and realities which are at the same time different and complementary and whose confines are not clearly defined. From a very young age they take on connotations which differentiate them from their peers and which emphasise their unique qualities. Young, sometimes extremely young future shamans disappear from the village, are kidnapped by the spirits and then, usually after a period of several years has lapsed, they manifest these peculiar qualities of theirs in periods of deep crises usually described as being periods of madness during which they are temporarily detached from the society which they are part of. During these periods future *pande* no longer respect the rules or roles of the society which they are trying to distance themselves from or in which they manifest behaviour which could be classed as dangerous. They act in exactly the opposite way to how they would normally act: they refuse to eat, escape into the forests, show no interest whatsoever in work or agricultural activities, stay away from their habitations and go to stay in places everyone else avoids like cemeteries or places used for the cremation of bodies on the banks of the river. These actions are usually also accompanied by other forms of deviant behaviour pathological in nature such as trembling and uncontrollable trances, amnesia, aggressive behaviour and incoherency which are usually characterised by delirium. The profession of the *pande* is never associated with an actual desire for the profession and is part of a system which is in itself fully recognised and accepted by all. Supernatural beings and worlds which are inaccessible to humans are seen as being the artefacts of this system and their calls must be manifested in a dramatic and very obvious manner thus leaving no doubt as to their origin. During initiatory crises, the whole community is witness to and experiences the danger of unknown, imagined worlds and their effects, which initially appear to be disastrous, on the individual. Order is eventually restored thanks to the knowledge acquired, this time indefinitely and the earlier deviant and dangerous behaviour witnessed by the whole community with great apprehension, only ever reappear in the course of shamanic seances where they are no longer cause for fear as the *pande* now has control over them and now uses them to access other worlds and the manifestations of supernatural beings and divinities in the world of humans. The oppressiveness brought on by the fear of the unknown is dissolved and the *pande* are proof that some members of the community can control all the cosmic levels and use this ability for the benefit of the community.

There is an almost unique situation in Shamanism where the individual and the collective co-exist and are inseparable. Each *pande* works individually, personally and on his own. No-one else except the *pande* has the knowledge which distinguishes them from normal humans and between themselves, nor do they know which divinities or tutelary spirits other *pande* have.

The *pande*, like a hero, must be a solitary figure who must bear the weight of having created a link to worlds and phenomena which are not held to be within

human competence. As we know, classical mythology had it that heroes were half god, half mortals and were able to prove this by doing impressive tasks.

*Pande* are certainly not believed to be semi-divine beings from birth but it is believed that it is the divine element within them which intervenes and makes them different and allows them to find solutions to different problems created by the gods themselves. In a certain sense the *pande* surpasses the figure of the mythological hero who is believed to have been born so, and is in fact a human who manages, through his actions, though this is only in accordance with divine will, to attain the status of hero in the eyes of the community.

The *pande* is different from commoners in that he or she has much greater knowledge. They have been invested with special powers; they can send their soul to any level of the Heavens or Underworld; they can defeat the most dangerous of demons and malefic beings; they can combat witches and usually restore peace or health to mortals. The *pande* is able to see and communicate directly with all supernatural beings. The *pande* is unique in that they have to deal with extremely dangerous situations all the time from which no other man would be able to save himself. The *pande*, and, I believe, shamans in general, are the ones who will battle with gods and the unknown in a heroic and courageous war. In the description of a shamanic seance held in a Chepang village to cure a young woman whose soul had been kidnapped by the dangerous rainbow goddess Indreni, we are told of how the *pande* had to go and meet this goddess face to face and physically get hold of her and shake her to force her to let go of the kidnapped soul. Indreni was so hot that the *pande* continually risked her life in the battle with her and this could be seen in the deep state of catalepsy the *pande* fell into in a moment when the goddess had the upper hand over her.

The *pande* is immune from many dangers which would cause the death of others, though this does not isolate him from society and he is almost always available for all the community except for the occasional private seances held by him when no others may be present.

The *pande* is the key figure and fulcrum around which the life of the Chepang community revolves. There is usually more than one *pande* in the village, and they are usually all respected and have their own 'clientele'. Given the desperate living conditions of the members of this group, the *pande* is very rarely given money for his work. They can, however, eat the meat of the animal which has been used as a sacrifice in a *puja* and, on rare occasions, are sometimes given small presents of rice or millet by their patients. In any case the *pande* never ask for anything for themselves<sup>232</sup> as this would be considered an offence by the divinities. Patients and people who turn to them for help must provide the materials<sup>233</sup> which will be used by the *pande* during the *puja*, including, of course, the sacrificial beast. In many cases, it is almost impossible for a Chepang to sacrifice a chicken as they would then lose its eggs which are an important element of their diet and therefore, despite being gravely ill, they are not able to hold the *puja*.

In one case which happened in Autumn 1995, three seances were held on three successive nights for a woman who was seriously ill. On the third night, which was when the woman's treatment was to have been completed, the woman did not come

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<sup>232</sup> As is the case with any profession in the world, there are *pande*, though this phenomena is quite rare, who use their profession to their advantage and rather than asking for money, they will ask for more than the necessary number of animals to be sacrificed. These people do not command much respect and are considered to be wizards rather than as *pande*.

<sup>233</sup> These usually consist of a little rice, incense, red powder, nutmeg and sometimes one or two eggs.

to the *pande*'s house for, as I was to find out later, she had not managed to find a chicken or even a chick for the last sacrifice. The *pande* had already called upon many divinities and spirits the preceding two nights and therefore had to carry out this third session at the end of which he asked for the god's pardon and promised that he would make the offering the following day. The *pande*, who was old and quite poor, was particularly depressed and confided in me that as he had promised a chicken would be sacrificed he could not go back on his word. If the sick woman had not been able to find the chicken the *pande* himself would have to find one, which he in fact did the next day when the patient sent word to say that she had not been able to find a chicken for the sacrifice. The *pande*, who had one broody hen and two chicks, had to sacrifice one of the latter. When I asked him what would have happened if he had not made the sacrifice, the *pande* explained that he was the only one in the community who could communicate directly with spirits and supernatural beings, both for himself and on behalf of the others in the village. He said that in the course of a journey to the Heavens, he had promised the blood of a chicken to various divinities who had in turn agreed to release the soul of the sick woman, thus allowing her to be cured.

These types of pacts and agreements are stipulated between supernatural beings and *pande* who, according to the latter, are held responsible for carrying them out. The woman would have been cured in any case because this is what had been agreed upon and promised by the inhabitants of the Heavens, but if the *pande* had not kept his word, this would have angered the gods who would have turned against him, perhaps even taking his life.

The *pande* is responsible for taking on many of the tensions and anxieties of commoners. He not only maintains and restores order after periods of personal or collective crises but also reassures humans about the unknown and divine for which he provides explanations which are accepted and shared by all, and acts as a mediator between the two.

As there are no village headmen in Chepang villages, the *pande* is the person everyone turns to in times of need. He cures illnesses, gives advice and holds all those ceremonies related to the circle of life mentioned previously.

The Chepang universe is populated by supernatural beings, demons and divinities who are thought to reside in the Underworld, Heavens and Earth itself. Almost any simple stone is considered either to house or be an altar for various different supernatural beings and the same applies to any form of running water, caves, forests and even the trees themselves. This relationship with the divine and anything which is unknown is a source of some tension for commoners which is allieved by the *pande* who guides every little movement in the community.

The *pande* often give advice and rules for the normal everyday activities of the community, especially to young people though also to adults. For example, they advise against sleeping too long or too deeply as Yama could easily take hold of one's soul and they would never wake up again. For the same reason one should never eat more than necessary (rare in Chepang villages) as digestion makes one sleepy which is dangerous. It is wise to keep water jars covered at all times as otherwise various types of malign spirits may be able to get into them and then be consumed by humans when they drink the water. One must also ensure that the fire never goes out after an evening meal, as it is believed that malign spirits attracted by the smell of the food could attack those present.

Therefore, even the most simple daily activities are linked to the world of the supernatural and could cause anxiety and worry if the *pande* were not able to suggest solutions and forms of behaviour to allay common fears.

One of the numerous functions of the *pande* which is extremely important is that they keep the links with ancestors alive, especially during the Chhonam Festival when offerings are made to the latter as well as to the divinities. The *pande* provides a link between the deceased and the living, thus reassuring and consoling people which, given the high infant mortality rate and the fact that the average life span is around fifty years for men and forty to forty-five for women, is especially important.

Ancestors are called up by the *pande* both during Chhonam and during funerals when they will call up those ancestors of the same lineage as the deceased. During long ceremonies in which the *pande* accompany a soul to the land where the divinities and worthy ancestors live, they must stop at a certain point as they cannot cross the threshold into the land of the deceased. The soul cannot be left alone, however, as it does not know the way and as it could decide to turn back to be with its loved ones, in which case, if it were to return to Earth, it could become a dangerous demon. This delicate situation can only be resolved by the *pande* calling up all the ancestors he remembers of the deceased and asking them to welcome the new soul and take it to its final resting place.

For all the bystanders who have attended this type of funeral ceremony, it is possible to find some consolation for the deep loss one feels in the accurate description given by the *pande* of their arrival at the threshold of the land of the deceased which cannot be crossed by mortals. For a short time the ancestors become alive and active and can have some sort of communication with the living through the figure of the *pande*. The tension is relieved, as is the pain and life in the village can go back to normal fairly quickly, thanks to a positive elaboration of mourning made possible by the shaman himself.

The *pande* does not only hold ceremonies to cure the illnesses of various individuals or calamities which have befallen a village but also restores order and peace to the latter.

The social facet of the *pande* is highlighted in moments of crisis which are fairly frequent given the difficult living conditions of the group, and which are a source of great tension and apprehension for the inhabitants of the village. In this case the *pande* will decide to hold a ceremony in which divination will be used to find the cause of the crisis and remedy it.

In a therapeutic seance which I attended in 1993, a seriously ill man was brought to the *pande* by his relations and many inhabitants of his village which was two days walk from the village where the seance was being held. Many *puja* had been held for him but no *jhakri* had managed to diagnose the cause of his illness and therefore find a remedy for it. After years of suffering, all the inhabitants of the village were now very worried as they believed this condition must certainly have been caused by some very powerful and clever supernatural being who might have been able to affect other individuals or cause damage.

In fact, I was told that there had been some inexplicable deaths amongst the cattle in the course of the past few months and this was cause for grave concern for all.

The *pande* Bir Bahadur then held a *puja* during which he found the cause of the man's suffering - it was the female god of a river in which the patient had probably urinated and given great offence. After he had gone into deep trances during which he dealt with the goddess, the *pande* managed, by using a mixture of flattery and threats which was followed apprehensively by everyone present, to convince the goddess not

to disturb the village, but he did not manage to save the soul of the patient which now belonged to the supernatural being. At the end of the seance, the *pande* told those present at the gathering, patient included, of what had happened and explained to the patient that he would die in a year. Although I found this to be somewhat dramatic, the fact that he had found an explanation dissolved the tension which had been building up amongst the villagers. The patient himself declared that he was relieved not only to learn of the cause of his problems but also that of the date of his death which he had thought would have been much earlier.

Smiles returned to everyone's faces and they began to chat peacefully, certain that nothing else would happen to the few animals they had and congratulated the sick man and the *pande* for having obtained a further twelve months of life for him<sup>234</sup>.

Apart from the role of *pande* within the society he lives in, we must also emphasise the importance of the shamanic seance, the *puja*, the only moment apart from perhaps weddings or funerals when all the villagers, whose habitations may be very far from one another, are together. Contact outside the family group is therefore often very rare and sporadic.

Not everyone in the community will attend all *puja*, but seances are so numerous that on average everyone is present at at least one or two ceremonies a week. During the Chhonam Festival the whole village is gathered together and can re-establish contact with their ancestors and the origins of the Chepang and the universe through the accounts of myths and stories which are told every year during this important ceremony.

The *pande* are the only custodians of the myths and it is only the *pande* who recount them, though other men can tell stories of spirits and witches which are believed to have actually happened and these have a great effect especially on younger people. Younger people learn most of the mythology and religion pertaining to their group from the *pande* alone who therefore play an important role in the education of the younger generations.

The shamanic ceremony, even more than the figure of the *pande*, is the only occasion on which alliances and relationships within the community are made. During the frequent pauses in the beating of the drum, everyone begins to chat, exchange opinions and talk about news of their families and that of those families they know and will also recount similar cases to the ones being treated in the seance they are attending.

Many people obviously feel a sense of belonging and cohesion when others recount similar events which have happened to them or others they know. The patient and their family in particular draw comfort from hearing of others who have been attacked by the same malefic spirits or who have lost their souls in the same manner and this is important as the person affected by magic powers can see that others in the same situation<sup>235</sup> as him have been cured, which in turn increases their trust in the efficiency of shamanic treatments.

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<sup>234</sup> A year after this incident had happened I went to the village of the sick man and was told that he had died a month before I had arrived and that there had been no more suspicious deaths amongst the cattle.

<sup>235</sup> The situation is very similar to what one would find in a western outpatients department. The conversations between the patients and their relatives usually centre around their own symptoms which everyone listens to carefully and this is followed by accounts of similar cases, suggested cures and assurances of a quick recovery.

### **The *pande* in the role of therapist**

According to statistics, less than ten percent of the population in Nepal do not have access to western-style health structures<sup>236</sup> and the fees for simple visits and thereon of medicine are absolutely prohibitive. Moreover, beyond the valley of Kathmandu there are almost no hospitals, clinics or health structures of any type and matters of health are completely disorganised.

Most of the rural population, especially those in the villages which are several hours or days walk away from the main roads, is not even aware of western medicine and has never had any contact with any form of health structure whatsoever. Many of those who have had experience of hospitals have found them extremely lacking and would be reluctant to try out non-traditional cures again<sup>237</sup>.

Apart from the so-called practical problems there are also other problems which often compromise the successful outcome of projects and foreign health aid: the concept of health in Nepal, like many parts of Asia, is very different to the western concept. As R.Greve<sup>238</sup> has said, and G.Heller<sup>239</sup> before him, being ill in Nepal implies a symptomatology which is often not recognised by western medicine as such or pertains to the field of psychiatry. On the other hand, in Nepal, many conditions which would be considered to be illnesses in western medicine are not considered such by the former. An example of this would be any type of wound, sometimes even fractures; coughs, bronchitis and pulmonary diseases in general; colds; pains such as those caused by arthritis or arthrosis and many common types of diarrhoea which are not complicated by other symptoms. The list is certainly longer and these are only a few of the cases in which one would never turn to either type of medicine, be it western or traditional.

The abovementioned conditions are so common that they are considered to be absolutely normal. Pulmonary illnesses in particular are a part of life for most inhabitants in Nepal from a very early age and mainly stem from the fact that the habitations used by most groups in the country have no windows or at best have small openings which means that the inside of the habitations is dense with smoke from the fire<sup>240</sup>.

R. Greve suggests that the symptoms and illnesses be divided into two large groups<sup>241</sup>; physiological conditions which are not believed to have been caused by spirits or malefic supernatural beings and conditions which are believed to have been

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<sup>236</sup> This data is reported in Acharya, B. K. 1994. Nature Cure and Indigenous Healing Practices in Nepal: a Medical Anthropological Perspective. In Allen, M. (ed), *Anthropology of Nepal; Peoples, Problems and Processes*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point: 243 - 244. See the aforementioned work for an interesting analysis of indigenous medicine in Nepal which exists alongside western types introduced by the British Mission and the opening of the first hospital - the Bir Hospital - about fifty years ago in Kathmandu. The former are more usually used by the local population for financial reasons.

<sup>237</sup> Two foreign doctors and a foreign nurse who wish to remain anonymous have confirmed that the percentage of deaths in hospitals due to post-operative infections, even after the simplest of operations, is extremely high and would seem to be over twenty percent (though some would put it at over thirty percent).

<sup>238</sup> Greve, R. 1981/82. A Shaman's Concepts of Illness and Healing Rituals in the Mustang District, Nepal. *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre*. Kathmandu: p.102.

<sup>239</sup> Heller, G. 1977. Die kulturspezifischen Organisationen körperlicher Störungen bei den Tamang von Cautara/Nepal. *Ethnologische Abhandlungen* 1. . Bad Barmstedt: pp.41 - 42.

<sup>240</sup> There are two reasons for the lack of openings: this offers protection against the bitterly cold winters, especially at night, and it is usually the only form of protection for the wooden structures against dangerous insects.

<sup>241</sup> Greve, R. 1981-1982, op.cit., pp.102 - 103.

caused by magic, acts of witchery or human acts of black magic (as in the case of witches or wizards) or attacks from supernatural beings. Obviously it is very difficult to differentiate clearly between the two, in that it would always be up to the shaman to attribute the cause of a particular condition to magic.

To diagnose the cause of an illness, the *bombo* of the Thakali group in the district of Mustang will take the pulse of the patient to decide if the condition has some supernatural cause<sup>242</sup>.

In conditions which according to modern western medicine would be of psychiatric nature, as far as we know, many ethnic groups in Nepal distinguish between 'madness' stemming from psychological decompensation and that caused by spirits. R. R. Desjarlais who has been conducting research into the Yolmo Sherpa of Helambu, states that the state of madness, called *smyon pa* in the local language, can, according to the shamans, either be caused by states of anxiety, by great pain, witches, divinities, demons or *ban-jhakri* who are called *ri bombo* in the Sherpa language<sup>243</sup>.

The same applies to the Chepang; I have been able to attend two cases of two individuals who had mental illness which appeared to be similar but which were treated in completely different ways. The *pande* involved in both cases (there was a gap of a year between them) were Krishora and her husband Hare.

In December 1992 a diagnostic ceremony was held at the house of the *pande* to discover what was causing the condition of madness in a young man called Chandra Bahadur<sup>244</sup>, about twenty years old, who appeared to have some form of serious mental illness<sup>245</sup>. Chandra Bahadur could hardly say a word except for his own name and showed signs of aggressive and unpredictable behaviour patterns to those who were near him and therefore his hands and legs were tied up for most of the day. This painful situation made the boy more agitated and he would shout with pain and grunt like an animal or go through phases when he would be completely introvert and put his head between his knees and rock silently thus for hours.

Before they began the *puja*, the *pande* said that they had already cured this boy once the preceding year and had freed him from a magic arrow which had been sent by a dangerous witch though they had not been able to uncover her identity.

After he had been cured the year before, the *pande* had ordered the young man to abstain from drinking alcohol, smoking, dancing or singing with friends, and avoid anything which could make him over-excited which, given his past medical history, would have weakened his soul and this would then have made him an easy target for the same witch. A few months after that, however, the boy started drinking, smoking and dancing again and so had a relapse.

At first I found it difficult to believe that Chandra Bahadur had been cured of what seemed to me to be a serious psychiatric condition but over the years that followed, I became convinced of this<sup>246</sup>.

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<sup>242</sup> Greve, R. 1981-1982, op.cit., p.104.

<sup>243</sup> Desjarlais, R. R. 1992. *Body and Emotion. The Aesthetics of Illness and Healing in the Nepal Himalayas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

<sup>244</sup> This is not his real name.

<sup>245</sup> I could see that the young man had a deep long scar which was old and stretched right across the forehead to the temple but I could not discover whether this had anything to do with the events as told to me.

<sup>246</sup> The case of Chandra Bahadur and many others have convinced me that it is vital that whoever takes on this type of study must follow cases for years so as to allow them to note any cures or relapses and the steps taken by the *jhakri* in that case. Sporadic and partial observation leads to the formulation of

The seance which I attended was only partly diagnostical in that the cause of the illness, a witch, had already been found though it was now necessary to establish who this person was exactly. It was a dramatic *puja*, more so than any others I had attended and the patient was more involved in what the *pande* was doing than in other cases where the person suffering the complaint may not even be present at the *puja* or may only appear when the ritual offering is presented to the divinities.

At nightfall, immediately after the sun had gone down, Chandra Bahadur was untied and remained absolutely calm and silent for the duration of the rite which began with the invocations and requests for help directed at the divinities by the shamans then followed by divinations carried out by Hare who, while looking continuously into his *ring*, declared he had uncovered the identity of the witch, a woman in the village where the young man and his family lived, about two days away from the *pande*'s village. Hare described the witch whose name he did not know as a fairly young woman of few words who would never look her interlocutors in the eyes. Chandra Bahadur's mother, visibly relieved by this discovery, said she had understood who had been behind all this. This phase was followed by the therapeutic part of the seance which actually involved the young man who was laid on the floor and completely covered by a heavy piece of material.

Krishora entered a state of trance and danced around him for a long time while her husband continued to sound the drum and, still dancing, would often jump over to the other side of the young man who was completely covered and therefore could not see nor move. The *pande* ran far away from the habitation and went to dance in the fields nearby while Chandra Bahadur was quickly taken back inside<sup>247</sup>. When Krishora came back, the boy was again taken outside onto the veranda where the *pande* stroked the membrane of the drum, which is used to attract negative energy and magic arrows and will then expel them, over his body many times. The ceremony was then brought to an end without there being an animal sacrificed, though an egg was offered up to some malefic spirits who had been called up by the sound of the drum.

The next day Chandra Bahadur and his mother left for their village and only after about a year had passed did I hear news of them: the young man appeared to have been cured, was married and had a son, and, though he had been marked by the experience, he was able to speak and work.

A short time after I had received this happy news, I was able to attend another case at Hare and Krishora's house, which, on the surface, appeared to be like that of Chandra Bahadur.

One evening a young Chepang woman about twenty to twenty-five years old called Joti<sup>248</sup> was brought to the house. She appeared to be in the same condition as Chandra Bahadur though she was not even able to say her own name.

Joti was accompanied by her older sister and her brother-in-law who explained to the *pande* that she had always been solitary and silent, especially after she had lost both parents at an early age, but that now things had got worse as the girl was completely incapable of understanding and was often aggressive, a fact which had caused the villagers much worry. The *pande*, who knew Joti's family though she lived far away, asked why her husband was not present: the sister explained that the

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mistaken theories which are completely worthless especially in relation to the question of how therapeutically efficient shamanic cures are.

<sup>247</sup> The whole *puja* took place outside the *pandes*' habitation as often happens when the patients belong to another ethnic group outside the Chepang. Chandra Bahadur and his mother are in fact Tamang.

<sup>248</sup> The name is fictitious.

husband, who was an extremely poor man and had to provide for Joti and their two small girls, had gone to India in the hope of finding a job breaking stones<sup>249</sup> for the road construction industry but no-one had heard anything of him for many months, nor had they seen any sign of money.

We have already mentioned the difficult conditions and stress faced by women. Joti's case in particular, with a bereavement which had taken place in her childhood, marriage at a young age, the birth of two children very close together, the loss of her third child who died just after it was born, the parting from her husband and terrible poverty must have left a profound mark on the soul and self-defence mechanisms of the young woman.

In societies like that of the Chepang, though men are also subjected to continuous tension, women are more exposed to this, also because of the type of virilocal habitations they live in. As we have already seen, extended families keep themselves much to themselves and from many points of view function as autonomous entities which are isolated from one another. Immediately after she gets married, the wife goes to live with her husband's family and often comes into conflict with the other women in the house, first of all her husband's mother and then the other brother's wives. The young woman has to face all her problems alone, from births<sup>250</sup>, to the frequent deaths of children in childhood, without the support of her family which she generally misses greatly after being married for a few months.

These feelings of solitude and nostalgia, together with other factors which we only have a partial description of, increase the possibilities of real depression which can at times be very deep (suicide rates are higher amongst women than men) or cause serious physiological or psychological suffering.

In Joti's case the *pande* held a diagnostic seance without using the *ring* and without going into trance as they usually do when meeting a patient for the first time. Hare threw some grains of rice on the membrane of the drum which he was holding in horizontal position and tried to analyse its shadows, but the answer was always the same. Joti had not been affected by any spirit and her temporary madness had been caused by the deep pain she had felt when her husband, of whom no news had been heard, had left.

The *pande* explained to the woman's sister and brother-in-law that there was nothing they could do in this case and that the only thing would be to try and keep her as calm as possible and try to make her eat at least once a day. Krishora then tried to console Joti's family and reassured them that when the husband, who may already have been on his way home<sup>251</sup>, returned, everything would go back to normal.

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<sup>249</sup> This is the sad destiny of many Chepang and people belonging to other ethnic groups living in the south of the country near the border between India and Nepal. Many, women and children sometimes under the age of five included, are used for work on building asphalt roads in India, but the pay is so bad (often from thirty to fifty Indian rupees a month which would correspond to two dollars) that it is difficult for anyone to provide for a family.

<sup>250</sup> We have said that women usually return to their own families a few months before they are to give birth but this only applies to those cases where the husband's village is not too far from that of the wife's family. It also depends on weather conditions as it is for example very difficult if not impossible to travel during the monsoon season when the rivers are bursting their banks which makes crossings impossible.

For further analysis of stress incurred by women which leads to different pathological conditions, with examples taken from Sherpa women, see Desjarlais, R. R.1992, op. cit., p.148 onwards.

<sup>251</sup> A few months later I heard that Joti had died in her sleep, without having shown any signs of serious illness.

The concept of health does not only apply to the body but also to the psychological condition of a person and their relations to the other individuals in the group. Health means harmony in all areas, given that even an argument or feelings of jealousy for someone can cause illness.

Even external factors which in some way involve the individual can cause illnesses of varying natures.

This was the case with one of the sessions I observed during the Chhonam Festival of September 1992 during which the *pande* was treating a man who had problems with his eyes and some mysterious ailment of the stomach with pains all over the body. According to the *pande*, his pains had been caused by a *boksi* but something else must have happened before the *boksi* had sent the magic arrow. During the chants, the *pande* asked various divinities for help several times using the following formula:

*'Push it out ! Push it out ! Push this illness out !  
I am worried: this man could die...  
(to the patient) Why is your soul divided into two ?  
Even your bones are divided into two, why ?  
Do not wander about the village: stay at home...  
You have almost been devoured by a boksi.  
Your eyes have been damaged,  
your eyes have been damaged but you are lucky to be alive.  
There has been a theft at your house !!  
(to the gods) I beg of you, do not chase this man out of this world....'*

The chant surprised the man's relatives who confirmed, in a moment of pause, that some time previously there had in fact been a theft in his house which had cleaned him out of what little possessions he had had. Suddenly everything became clear to the *pande* who declared that it had been the pain and shock of this which had weakened the man's soul which had in turn alerted the attention of some witch who had then caused him to fall ill: after he had lost his possessions, all he had left was his life.

P. Sagant describes three levels: that of the body, society and supernatural beings and these three levels are interlinked in many cultures and peoples in both Asia and America<sup>252</sup>. What the French scholar reports can be seen in the abovementioned chant where there was some oscillation between the physiological level (problems with eyes, 'divided' bones), the divine level (requests addressed to the gods asking them to send away the illness) and the social level (the theft). The same applies to the case of Chandra Bahadur who became mentally ill because of the black magic used by a *boksi*. After the *pande* had cured the supernatural causes of his condition, they ordered the boy to lead as healthy a life as possible by not smoking, drinking alcohol nor dancing or singing socially.

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<sup>252</sup> Sagant, P. 1988. The Shaman's Cure and the Layman's Interpretation. *Kailash, a Journal of Himalayan Studies* XIV(1-2). Kathmandu:29 (First Edition 1987, *L'ethnographie* LXXXIII:100 - 101). I consider this article to be one of the best works on the subject of shamanic cures in the area of the Himalayas as there is a long and interesting account of a powerful Limbu shaman and his difficult relations with other inhabitants of the village who spent years debating whether Pirtung, the *jhakri*, was an extremely powerful shaman or a dangerous wizard. Pirtung's cures were in fact so efficient, even in cases where tens of *jhakri* had not succeeded, that some of those cured by him, including the village headman who had been cured of a dangerous abscess, had begun to believe that only the person who had sent the illness would have been able to cure it. The account is extremely interesting and is in fact unique in its account of events which happened over a period of more than six years.

In the words of P. Sagant:

‘The shaman does not treat the organ or the body out of context. He treats the body in its environment. But, before the anthropologist completes his survey of and gives way to the psychoanalyst, who will use his own paradigms to explain the effectiveness of the cure, I think we should look at how the Limbus themselves think of these things. Their views of body, the life force, the flower-soul, , spirit attacks, have no for us. And yet sometimes manipulating these symbols brings about a cure. This effectiveness raises many questions of general interest.’<sup>253</sup>

The interrelation between the three levels of the body, the supernatural and the social level also allow a certain permeability between the shamanic cure and western medical cures. The *pande* are aware the latter exists and are not against accepting medicines for their own or their patients’ use. Western medicines are believed to be able to dispel or alleviate symptoms of illnesses and therefore cater for the body, but they are not believed to ‘cure’. In the Chepang villages near the city of Hetauda in the district of Makwanpur, there are various inhabitants who, at least once in the course of their lifetime, have been to the city hospital. Most do not have the means to buy the costly medicines which are prescribed but, in the event that some kind-hearted nurse should be able to get them the medicine free of charge, they will take them regularly and scrupulously follow the instructions given<sup>254</sup>. However, the *pande* must be consulted at the same time as only he can determine the cause of the condition and therefore cure it forever.

The *pande* often say that if one were only to use western medicine, those conditions which have been caused by magic would then reappear after a period of time in which they had been sedated by the various pills and tablets taken, and could even be more serious than before. Western medicines, like those of the ancient Indian Ayurvedic medicine or herbal cures, are considered to be effective in the treatment of those conditions which are not caused by supernatural beings or in sporadic cases to alleviate suffering which has been caused by malefic beings and divinities.

Shamanic treatment has three phases: diagnosis which is made by using divination; cures, which vary according to the supernatural beings responsible for the condition; and the curing of the condition which is completed with the final sacrifice which symbolises the extraction of the illness from the body of the patient.

P. Sagant rightly considers diagnosis to be extremely important as it depends on the *jhakri*’s ability to , distinguish between <sup>255</sup> and determine the cause of the suffering of an individual or even a whole community.

S. M. Shirokogoroff notes four types of divinations which are used by many Siberian shamans to determine the causes of illnesses and disasters: those which take place in trances, dreams, using various techniques and instruments and finally, by arriving at logical conclusions<sup>256</sup>.

One cannot only look at divination in diagnostic seances as sometimes in the course of a shamanic seance one of those present will ask the *pande* for a divination in order to discover something about what will happen in the future or will ask for a divination in order to find someone who has been lost or could even ask for a divination in order

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<sup>253</sup> Sagant, P. 1988, op.cit., p.27.

<sup>254</sup> The colour of the capsule and tablets is considered to be of great importance: the red ones are considered to be the most powerful, perhaps because they are similar to the colours of the powders used in all the *puja* which are used to make offerings to the divinities.

<sup>255</sup> Sagant, P. 1988, op.cit., p.7.

<sup>256</sup> Shirokogoroff, S.M. 1935, op. cit., p.315.

to discover who has carried out a theft. All types of divinations are, however, carried out according to the form required.

The Chepang use all four of the techniques described by Shirokogoroff, though the third type is most frequently used, during which the *pande* hold their drum in a horizontal position, throw some grains of rice onto the membrane and observe and interpret two things: the shadows cast by the fire and the movement of the rice.

In the first case, the *pande* is able to distinguish between different types of shadows and determine which spirit or spirits are causing the problems. Any movement of the grains of rice is usually a good sign as this symbolises vitality and suggests which strategies can be used to fight against the malefic beings. If the grains of rice do not move, this probably means that the patient will die.

Diagnosis can also be made by taking the patient's pulse and this is the case with various groups in the Himalayan area<sup>257</sup> though how it is taken varies from place to place. The Chepang *pande* usually press the middle finger onto the vein of the patient's pulse and mentally check for a supernatural being or a possible cause of the condition with each beat of the pulse. The *pande* receives a sort of shock to his body if he finds the name of the being who could have caused the condition and the patient's pulse may miss a beat. This is the only technique to be used only during therapeutic seances.

Divination through dreams is also used though this is fairly rare and perhaps more personal. Divination requires that there be some sort of social and collective consensus which in turn adds to the *pande*'s prestige. Generally speaking, divinations which take place during dreams either apply to the *pande* or to the whole community. As we have already noted when examining the subject of the drum, if a *pande* dreams of falling from a tree, this means that someone in the village will die. If the tree is a *sandan* tree then the person to die will be a *pande*, while if they dream of a tree with many of its branches intertwined this will probably signify a cholera epidemic.

Divination during states of trance is also used during nocturnal seances when a diagnostic seance has not been held previous to this; the diagnostic seance takes place without using the drum, just with chants and *mantra*.

The latter form of diagnostic *puja* are carried out before sunset and the *ring* is not used, nor are altered states of conscience. They are usually held when the *pande* does not believe the patient's condition has been caused by supernatural beings or in cases which he believes are not serious. In some cases, the *pande* can tell from the moment he comes into contact with the patient whether a nocturnal seance is necessary in the course of which diagnosis will then take place when the *pande* is in a state of trance. During the trance the *pande* will go to other cosmic areas to determine the cause of the suffering of the patient or he may ask the divinities and assistant spirits to show him the image of the malefic spirit inside the drum. This is then scrutinised very carefully and becomes a mirror reflecting fast moving fragmented images amongst which the *pande* must be able to recognise what he is looking for.

Finally, what Shirokogoroff calls deduction is used when the patient suffering from pain and illness is aware of having committed some sin or believes he is impure. An example of this would be if the patient has knowingly come into contact with corpses or if he has desecrated some sacred place which was resided in by some divinity or divinities who are now upset.

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<sup>257</sup> See Greve, R. 1981 - 1982, op. cit., p.115.

The list of spirits, divinities, supernatural beings, witches and wizards who can cause illnesses is very long and complex. Here we present a partial diagram of the main causes of illnesses.

Many elements in this list have been taken from Hindu tradition, such as demons from the court of Shiva<sup>258</sup>, though their names are usually used by all Nepalese groups to define beings whose descriptions vary from one ethnic group to another.

Name caused.	Characteristics	Main symptoms and illnesses
Kal	A <i>graha</i> or planet which lives in the nine Heavens and can be sent to Earth by Yama in the form of a young boy or girl with long grey hair.	An attack by Kal signifies certain death for the person in question.
Niu		caused by Niu.
100 Princes (Sai Kumar)	These live in the valley of Kathmandu and are dangerous demons.	Mainly attack children. They induce cholera, vomiting and dysentery.
Indreni and Chattrak	The rainbow goddess and her demon servant.	Chattrak in particular strikes during the monsoon season; she can cause frequent loss of consciousness with a loss of saliva from the mouth.
Nine Stars (nautara)	These live in the celestial levels with the other stars.	Eye infections and disturbances.
Nag	Snake divinity in the <i>patal</i> .	Does not strike often but when it does it can cause serious illnesses. It can also cause leprosy and paralysis.
Bayu or Vayu	These are invisible wind demons which can sometimes assume the form of a monkey with a particularly long nose and large belly. It is	These cause problems for animals. They can also induce violent and uncontrollable trances in humans, stomach pains, pains in the spleen and aerophagia.

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<sup>258</sup> For more information, see Daniélou, A. 1985. *The Gods of India*. New York: Inner Traditions International: p.302.

	believed that souls which have had a violent death or have died in accidents can be turned into <i>bayu</i> . They only accept sacrifices of black goats.	
Bhut-Pret	Invisible demons which come in human form. They live at the edge of the jungle and on the banks of rivers.	These cause strong headaches and dizziness accompanied by vomiting.
Bir	These can appear as wild boar. Some of them live in the jungles and on the banks of rivers, others live in cemeteries where they are believed to live in seven rooms. They accept sacrifices of black goats.	They can cause temporary or permanent madness in humans. They also induce losses of consciousness, uncontrollable and vomiting. Those affected are usually unable to hold a logical conversation. In some cases they have been known to cause a serious illness during which the patient feels no pain and the only symptom is a line of blood which comes out of the mouth (internal haemorrhage?). In this case death is usually certain. The <i>bir</i> can also cause problems for animals.
Mashan (T496a)	Some of these demons live on the banks of rivers and feed exclusively on fish; they come in human form and can also be seen by humans. Others take on the form of dogs.	These cause headaches with dizzy spells as well as muscle pain and pains in the articulations.
Pisac (or Agati)	These are the souls of the deceased, particularly of children who have died early on in infancy before they have learnt to speak. They have human form but are invisible.	As these spirits are jealous of children who are still alive they induce many illnesses, mainly fever and vomiting which can also affect adults.
Raksas (T532a)	These live in dense	They can cause a very high fever which

	forests and in iron, stones and the ground which they also feed on. Some of them live in cemeteries though not near the <i>bir</i> and feed on one hundred corpses per meal. They are enormous and can assume the form of headless humans.	is lethal and can sometimes be the cause of death of a patient though this is a rare occurrence.
Namrung Shikari	These are the hunters belonging to the god Namrung. They live in the forests and jungles and appear in the form of wolves.	Cardiac problems.
Boksi (Belam Bharu in Chepang)	There are three main types of these: the <i>ban-boksi</i> , wives of the <i>ban-jhakri</i> ; the <i>kitchkanne</i> and human women who become witches either of their own will, in which case it is the mother who is usually also a witch who functions as guru, or because they have often been possessed by a <i>ban-boksi</i> . The <i>kitchkanne</i> live in cemeteries and feed on corpses.	The <i>ban-boksi</i> rarely attack humans, but when they do they cause violent states of trance. Anyone who has sexual relations with a <i>kitchkanne</i> believing her to be a normal woman will gradually become weaker and weaker and lose their strength, as the witch feeds on his blood during intercourse. Human <i>boksi</i> are the worst adversaries of the <i>pande</i> and the commonest sources of illness which are usually believed to be curable. They usually affect pregnant women, killing the foetus so they can feed on it. They may also induce haemorrhages and illnesses in the mother. They can also cause heart pain as they are very fond of human hearts, as well as stomach pain and, in some cases, a temporary form of madness.
	They appear to humans in the form of beautiful women, even though they only	

exist in one dimension:  
 if you were to look behind  
 them you would only  
 find an empty space. The  
*kitchkanne* bewitch  
 men and every night  
 go to have intercourse with  
 them. Human *boksi*  
 can be recognised in  
 that they cannot look  
 anyone directly in the  
 eye. They can change  
 into black cats or dogs  
 and sometimes even  
 pigs if they have  
 relations with the *bir*.  
 When they take on  
 animal form they  
 cannot cross sacred  
 places or the threshold  
 of temples.

Diagnosis, during which a preventive *puja* can be held, is then followed by therapy. The types of actions taken by the *pande* can vary according to the different beings which are believed to have caused the illness, but usually follow set patterns.

We shall look in detail at a Chepang shamanic seance which was held to cure a Tamang girl called Maya<sup>259</sup> who had been affected by the servant of Indreni, the rainbow goddess, in the monsoon season.

During the rainy season, Chattrak is believed to be the cause of many conditions and people are especially careful not to touch the waters in rivers when the rainbow is in the sky. Chattrak is considered to be very dangerous as she is believed to want to feed on humans and leads them to their death for that purpose. However, the *pande* retain Indreni to be the more dangerous even though she is held to be indifferent to the human race. This seance was chosen for its drama, complexity and as it is easier to see the two different levels which the *pande* often move between compared to the one level moved in by humans.

If it is actually true that the *pande* believe they are putting their lives at risk during seances, we must note that there are different grades of danger which distinguish the *pande* from commoners. For example, all *pande* agree that humans generally suffer most from conditions caused by the *boksi* and everyone recognises that witches can actually kill men, women and children by using their magic weapons. On the other hand, it is also believed that *boksi* cannot do much against the *pande* and do not present much of a danger for them. The Chepang *pande* say that the real danger for them lies in those beings and divinities they come into direct contact with during trance. The danger, as the wise *pande* Tulo Kancha once told me, lies in knowledge and one could die because of something one knows.

Thus, for example, the *raksas* demons are believed to be disinterested in the world of humans and they rarely induce illnesses. Chepang mythology has it that these

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<sup>259</sup> This name is fictitious.

beings live on Earth, in the Heavens and the Underworld and are often deadly dangerous for the *pande* who believe that there is a land populated by them and other beings whose name they refuse to say as this very act of pronouncing the names of *raksas* or other such demons would make one become mad, and this applies not only to *pande*, but also to those who possess this information<sup>260</sup>.

The seance held for the young woman who had been affected by the rainbow was held in the district of Makwanpur and held by the shamans Hare and Krishora. According to the two shamans, the patient, Maya, had all the symptoms of someone who had been attacked by Chattrak. In terms of western medicine, these were not unlike those found in epilepsy: loss of consciousness, violent convulsions and large amounts of saliva lost orally, especially when there was a full moon.

Maya's situation was so serious that she had to have two *puja*:. During the first of these, a little after it had started, Krishora, while making the diagnosis in a state of trance, fell to the ground all of a sudden in a state of apparent death and this lasted for about seven minutes. Her husband was able to revive her by using different massage techniques and by making her drink lots of water. This was interpreted as having been caused by Indreni, the rainbow goddess, as she is the only one who can make *pande* lose their senses. Maya had probably gone to the river after it had finished raining when the rainbow, which had emerged from the Underworld was in the sky and had been attacked by the dangerous Chattrak who had taken possession of her soul and now wanted her to die. In this case several items were required in order to be able to continue *puja* which therefore had to be postponed for several days so as to allow the patient and her mother to find the necessary items.

The real therapeutic *puja* was held four days later on the veranda of the shamans' house as Maya was not a Chepang. After the usual invocations and requests for help from the friendly divinities and assistant spirits, particularly to the sun and moon who are considered to be able to control the rainbow, Krishora and her husband then, as is usual in these cases, began to trace a drawing of the goddess responsible for the illness out onto the ground with coloured powders.

These figures are extremely interesting in that they illustrate the vision the *pande* have of supernatural beings and for this reason, though they would appear to be somewhat abstract if interpreted by using western artistic criteria and aesthetics, they are in fact not. They constitute one of the most important moments in the Chepang seance and are therefore followed attentively<sup>261</sup>.

Whether a *puja* is held inside the habitation or outside on the veranda, the confined space available represents the universe, the human dimension being represented by the patient and the public and the *pande*, who moves between the many different levels and the divinities and spirits called up by the sound of the drum and the invocations. Friendly divinities and assistant spirits, who are invisible, are thought to

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<sup>260</sup> People are particularly wary of pronouncing the name of a particular divinity or spirit. The *pande* believe that every time a name is pronounced the supernatural being or divinity named is automatically called up. It is therefore often necessary during interviews and talks to make small offerings to the gods one mentions. These usually take the form of grains of rice. Often even saying the name of an assistant spirit or particularly important divinity for the *pande* can cause the latter to enter into a state of trance which lasts for a few seconds. This is why it is difficult to talk of malefic beings as merely saying their names could call them up and cause great problems to all present. When talking of the mythical land of demons in particular people are very reserved, though not so much about initiatory secrets, and are afraid that if they give names this could cause these beings to make the *pande* die or go mad forever.

<sup>261</sup> Riboli, D. 1995. Shamanic Visual Art. Kim, T. And Hoppál, M. (eds.) *Shamanism in the Performing Arts*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó.

sit beside the fire which is always present even in seances which are held outside and, opposite them a short distance away there are different types of demons which the *pande* must keep in check all the time to ensure they do not do any harm to those attending the seance.

The *pande*'s abilities lie not only in whether he can travel to other cosmic zones but also in his skill at bringing beings who live at other levels either up or down to the Earth.

The designs made in the course of a *puja* are the best evidence of these abilities in a Chepang shaman who usually traces different figures out on the ground according to whether the seance involves a journey through the cosmos or not. This can also be done if the being which has caused problems or illnesses has come to Earth. In the first case, the *pande* will use coloured powders to make a cosmic design on the ground and this is usually divided into squares or rectangles which represent the various levels and different rooms in the Heavens and Underworld.

In the course of a particularly interesting seance, the shaman Tulo Kancha took more than two hours to make one of these extremely complicated designs. Once he had finished, he started the *puja* and went into a state of trance during which he had to travel to almost all the cosmic zones he knew. In this case the design becomes like a sort of chess board where the public can follow the movements of the *pande* who tells them where he is while he is in trance, even which room he is in and which divinities he visits. When the *pande* is in trance like state he experiences a dilated and three dimensional vision of what the public sees on the ground. The symbolic design functions as a map of the cosmos and is at the same time an exact copy and illustration of other worlds. Tulo Kancha's complex design in particular had, amongst other things, three eggs all in a line. The first of these was placed at the entrance which was located a few centimetres away from and directly opposite where the *pande* was sitting; the second, which was bigger as it was a duck's egg, was placed in the centre and the third opposite the first and therefore at the exit of the design. After the particularly deep trance, Tulo Kancha explained that cosmic journeys are very dangerous because one often meets angry divinities or malefic spirits and this is why the eggs are placed at different points along the path. The soul of the *pande* can find refuge in these when in danger. The largest egg is always used by the soul of the *pande*'s guru, the *ban-jhakri* and he himself can also find refuge there.

There are no spatial or temporal boundaries in a *puja*, as there are none in between the different worlds. The whole universe can fit into a few square metres while an egg can function as a refuge and house either a divinity or the *pande* himself.

The second type of design is different in that these show representations of the supernatural being called up and there are no cosmic designs.

This is what happened in the case of Maya: although the demon Chattrak was responsible for her condition, the *pande* had to make a design of Indreni as they had more contact with her. Three pieces of material were placed on the ground, white, red and black in colour. Lines were traced on the black one with the same coloured powders and these illustrated a vaguely anthropomorphic figure and then all of this was then encircled by red powder.

This type of design has two functions: first of all it calls up the supernatural being it represents and then it becomes a sort of passage or door which allows the being to come down to the level of humans and take its place on the design by sitting on it.

In fact, as soon as the illustrations of Chattrak and Indreni were completed, Krishora began to dance in a state of trance, accompanied by the sound of the drum which was played by Hare and after a few seconds she fell into a deep catalepsy

which it was very difficult to get her out of. When she finally regained her senses, Krishora appeared to be shocked and immediately fled into the forest. No-one could follow her and we could hear her shouts which were at times fierce and at times it seemed as if she were sobbing, which was a sign of a magic battle taking place. When she returned to the veranda, the *pande* fell into a second state of catalepsy which was even deeper than the first<sup>262</sup>.

The patient and all those present were shocked and frightened by what had happened as this repeated loss of consciousness could have caused Krishora to die and the state of catalepsy was interpreted as being the onset of death. When she regained her senses, her husband Hare, after further invocations and dances, went into the third phase of the *puja*, the sacrifice. A cock was produced and was passed over Maya's body many times.

In order to retrieve a human soul, one must attempt to exchange it for that of an animal: the sacrificial animal then becomes the alter ego of the patient and the illness must be passed on to the latter<sup>263</sup>. The animal to be used for sacrifice, usually a cock, chicken, hen or goat according to the preferences of the supernatural beings involved, is then passed over those parts of the body which are in pain and it is therefore often necessary that the animal eat grains of rice which are placed on the head or held in the hands or legs of the patient. By eating the rice, the animal consumes the illness and is then ready for sacrifice.

In Maya's case, the cock offered by the girl was decapitated and the blood was immediately placed on that part of the design of Indreni which showed her head and Hare then began to dance fast and erase all the lines made of coloured powder which were then mixed with blood as is usually the case.

This sudden destruction of the design symbolises the closing of the door which has allowed the supernatural being to come to the Earth and prevents it from finding its way back again.

The seance ends with a greeting and thanks offered to those divinities who have intervened at some point. At the end of the *puja*, the *pande* will usually explain what has happened to those present and offer advice to the patient if they are not too tired.

Maya did not get a very positive response as Krishora explained that she still had not really managed to free her soul and had only managed to calm Chattrak which meant that the girl would certainly have several more years of life and from that moment onwards and for another month the girl had no fits of fainting or convulsions.

The manner in which seances are conducted and the way in which the various different magic weapons are used all influence the patient and the public present.

One matter which has hardly been touched on by anthropologists and ethnologists is the extremely interesting and yet delicate question of how effective shamanic cures are. And yet Shirokogoroff notes:

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<sup>262</sup> The explanation given for these long periods during which she lost her senses was given to me by the *pande* later. It is believed that in order for the *pande* to retrieve the soul of the patient he has to go to the end of the rainbow and shake it violently to convince Indreni to order Chattrak to release it. Indreni is so hot that, as the *pande* said, fire is nothing in comparison and it is this heat which causes the *pande* to lose their senses and risk their lives. Cold water must then be given to the *pande* to counteract the raging heat.

<sup>263</sup> At the end of the *puja* the animal can in theory be eaten by anyone except the patient, for whom it would be like eating him or herself.

'A great number of observations made by the Manchus and Tungus is quite convincing: the interference of the shamans is effective, both in cases of individual troubles and in those of mass troubles.'<sup>264</sup>

There are two main ways of interpreting shamanic cures: one of these, the intellectual one, held by the British school of Social Anthropology, according to which the shaman acts in such a way as to generate the belief in the patient that he will recover<sup>265</sup> in that this is what happened in the past and this must therefore be the case now. The patient's attitude to his illness would then change and the illness is seen in a different light.

According to other interpretations, mainly French, which take their lead from C. Lévi-Strauss' work on symbolic effectiveness<sup>266</sup>, the shaman can, through the use of different symbols and metaphors, provide a form of language which the patient can then express himself in and thus change his vision of the world and his illness<sup>267</sup>.

Both theories are equally valid though somewhat oversimplify the matter. The shaman does not only function by using symbols nor does he limit himself to instilling trust in the patient. The relations between shaman and patient; patient and the public; shaman and the public are well developed and the efficacy of a Chepang *pande* also depends on how he creates and maintains these relations. One starts by assuming that everyone shares the same beliefs and has the same faith and the shaman operates on this pretext : that phase of the seance after a divination when the cause of the illness is revealed is extremely important and tense moment. The fact that the cause of a particular illness has been identified in a particular supernatural being or witch means that from that moment onwards the condition can be cured. The patient no longer feels alone and at the mercy of hostile unknown forces and all those present feel relieved in the knowledge that something can be done and that there are people among them, the *pande*, who have been given the necessary knowledge to defeat even the most powerful of supernatural beings. The realisation that there is in fact a human force which is superior even to that of the divinities or at least equal to them means that the Chepang feel less oppressed by the unknown.

This faith is built upon every time there is a therapeutic *puja* even if the *pande* sometimes admits there is nothing he can do to save the life of a patient. These cases are actually very rare and only if this happens repeatedly is the ability of the shaman in any doubt. Most of the time it is usually thought that the hostile forces are particularly clever or that there has been the intervention of some divinity whose decisions cannot be reversed, not even by the *pande*, as is the case with Yama raja, the god of death.

A patient's condition is never considered to be strictly limited to the individual and the whole family and often the whole community becomes involved. The most obvious case is when the spirit of a person who died in an accident or died violently is believed to have caused the condition because he was angry at having lost his life and prematurely returns to cause problems to his family or the other inhabitants of the

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<sup>264</sup> Shirokogoroff, S. M. 1935, op.cit., p.342.

<sup>265</sup> See Frank, J. 1974. *Persuasion and Healing a Comparative Study of Psychotherapy*. New York., and Skorupski, J. 1976. *Symbol and Theory: A Philosophical Study of Theories of Religion in Social Anthropology*. Cambridge.

<sup>266</sup> Lévi-Strauss, C. 1958. *Anthropologie Structurale*. Paris: Libraire Plon.

<sup>267</sup> See also Dow, J. 1986. Universal Aspect of Symbolic Healings: A Theoretical Synthesis. *American Anthropologist* 88.

village<sup>268</sup>. In these cases, the individual who becomes ill within a group is considered to be the first link in a chain of possible disasters which could befall the community in general.

The actions of the *pande* have both symbolic and social significance and reinstate both order and health at all three abovementioned levels; that of the body, that between the gods and spirits and within society itself.

The effectiveness of the shamanic cure must be judged in the context of these three factors: there is not much point considering a seance to be effective only in the event that the patient is cured. It is not enough for the *pande* to cure the patient and restore harmony to his body and soul, he must also re-establish the equilibrium between the individual in question, his or her family and therefore also the community he or she is part of. In order to do this the *pande* must first either restore order to other cosmic levels or combat some form of human witchery.

It would be interesting to look at shamanic treatments and cures of young children who are not subject to suggestion or faith in certain beliefs. R. R. Desjarlais has dedicated part of his work to describing a few cases where Helambu<sup>269</sup> Sherpa children have lost their souls, which the Sherpa believe is fairly frequent amongst children, for example in the event of falls or shock.

The Chepang present a similar case in that the infant and in fact, overall mortality rate is extremely high and it therefore follows that large numbers of children come to the *pande* for help.

The percentage of cures is high even in those cases where the presence of family and society is stronger. In April 1995 I attended the case of a six month old baby who appeared to be suffering greatly. For the past week he had had a high temperature and diarrhoea, his body became rigid at short intervals and jerked backwards while his eyes moved round and round.

The mother appeared to be suffering the most because she was anxious at the possibility of losing her only male child. The *pande* saw the symptoms quickly and after a somewhat superfluous divination determined that a goddess in the valley of Kathmandu near the most important Buddhist temple of Swayambunath was the cause. This goddess usually attacks children before they are able to speak and takes their soul in an attempt to kill them. Almost all those present, my guide included, who had a child of three, then started to discuss the case and remember similar cases. The illness and cause appeared to be very common and was supposedly easily cured: almost all those present told of how at least one of their children had been attacked by the same goddess.

The mother of the little patient appeared to be relieved by this and began to talk and laugh again, and started to feed her child who accepted the breast for a moment and then he began to have contorsions and groan. All those present agreed that the only way of counteracting the power of this goddess was for the *pande* to find a cure and assured the mother that the child would be cured in a few days. The *pande* called up the goddess by means of invocations and chants and she soon appeared through the *pande*, asking for a meagre sacrifice of a little rice and some incense.

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<sup>268</sup> In some ethnic groups this spirit has mythological origins, as is the case with the Mewahang Rai. This group was studied by Gaenzle, M. A. 1994. Journey to the Origin: a Root Metaphor in a Mewahang Rai Healing Ritual. In Allen, M. (ed.), *Anthropology of Nepal, People, Problems and Processes*. Kathmandu: Mandala Book Point: pp.256 - 268.

<sup>269</sup> Desjarlais, R. R. 1992, op. cit., pp.145 onwards.

The offerings were made and the seance, which was quite short and had lasted less than an hour, came to an end. The next day the child appeared to be much better and the day after that both the high fever and rigidity of the body disappeared<sup>270</sup>.

These cases are very difficult to treat as one cannot count on faith in the *pande*'s powers when children are very young. What is important is not why even the youngest of children can benefit from the *pande*'s treatment but the fact that the *pande* works with all levels of society. After more than a week, the mother and all the family of the little patient were able to relax and share their problem with others who had had the same experience. The *pande* uncovered the cause of the illness in the presence of all and brought humans and divinities into contact with each other through the making of offerings thus alleviating the tensions and reassuring those present.

The dangerous goddess could not ask for anything else and would have to be satisfied with the offerings of incense and rice in the place of the soul and life of the child.

This particular child was cured, as the children of other inhabitants of the village had been in the past and as many other children would be in the future, the *pande* always being in a position to protect the younger generations from danger.

Though the *pande* has many other important functions, this function as a therapist appears to be the main one. Therapeutic seances are the most common, given the numerous illnesses of various types which occur in Chepang villages.

M. Perrin and other scholars believe that the therapeutic function of the shaman, which is more marked than that of shamans in other parts of the world, is actually a function which developed later than earlier ones which see the shaman's principle function as being associated with hunting activities<sup>271</sup>. This could mean that an initial difference could be traced between male and female Shamanism, the former, at least initially, being associated with the world of hunting while the latter probably evolved in order to find solutions for various illnesses, initially in women and children, such as problems with pregnancies, births and the health of the foetus and then newborn child and children. This theory, though somewhat hazardous, would appear to have some weight in some of the ethnic groups where Shamanism is present.

This strong link to the world of hunting is still evident in the Chepang though not always obvious in the course of therapeutic seances. The most important element is the fact that the *pande*'s drum is highly personalised. All Chepang shamans agree that the *ring* is a hunter whose weapons are represented by the chains and iron hangings of symbolic shapes to the rear of the instrument, his clothes and belt being represented by the goat hide membrane and frame of the drum.

This is why the *pande* never decorate the surface of their drums with the cosmic designs used by shamans in other groups. Cosmic journeys carried out by the *pande* and the soul of his drum are often compared to hunting trips where the prey is a soul which has been kidnapped by supernatural beings who they may enter into an agreement with or more often actually battle with.

When the drum is a hunter, the *pande* is often a warrior fighting hard with divinities and spirits. In the dramatic case of the seance held for Maya, the girl's soul had been captured by Chattrak, the dangerous servant of the rainbow goddess Indreni and the *pande* Krishora had to actually fight a battle with the goddess and catch hold of her

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<sup>270</sup> I have seen many cases like the one described in which the patients were very young children and the percentage of those cured is very high, around eighty percent.

<sup>271</sup> Perrin, M. 1995. *Le Chamanisme*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

and shake her violently at risk to her own life. The flight into the forest while in a state of trance which followed was a clear example of the battle in course. No-one could follow the *pande* as it was so dark and the situation so dangerous, but everyone could hear the harsh shouts of the *pande* who then returned to the place where the seance was being held dishevelled and with several scratches on her face and arms.

Many elements in the Chepang *puja* indicate the influence of hunting and warrior activities and these are the same in both male and female Shamanism, so much so that is difficult to see how these could have differed in the past.

We must not forget that Namrung, lord of hunting, is the most important god for this group. The *pande* often turn to him with invocations for help and some of the hunter-slaves of the god are believed to cause cardiac conditions.

We have already examined the concept of illness, which varies greatly from western concepts, but not yet looked at the way illness is seen in the Chepang collectively. Illness is always the result of a crisis situation and of imbalance. It manifests itself at the level of humans, supernaturals and at a social level. Illness is never seen in terms of physical suffering alone and is thus treated as the exterior manifestation of a deeper crack in an equilibrium which could derive from different causes which the *pande* must be able to determine.

Pain, physical and psychological suffering can be interpreted as being forms of divine punishment for those who have infringed the rules of behaviour but can also derive from a simple caprice or some supernatural beings' yearning for human flesh or blood. It could even be the result of malefic witchery or wizardry. The human soul is always in danger and the slightest weakness can fuel critical or dangerous situations which cause great suffering in the whole community and this attributes almost unlimited powers to the *pande*. Only the *pande* can determine the cause of an illness and decide if it has been caused by supernatural beings or is of physiological nature and he does this through the use of divinations which are carried out after the symptoms have become apparent. Divination and diagnosis take place contemporaneously and are inseparable.

Therapeutic seances almost always follow the same pattern: the patient and his or her family go to the house of the *pande* though if the patient is not in a condition to travel, the shaman is sent for. It must be noted that the shaman does not usually refuse such requests even though travelling to the patient's house may involve long and tiring journeys.

Before the nocturnal seance is held, a diagnostic seance may have been held during which the *pande* sits opposite the patient and puts on his ritual bead necklaces, chants invocations to the divinities and the assistant spirits asking them to determine the cause of the illness. These seances are usually short and last an hour at the most, after which there is a phase where the *pande*, patient and family will talk together and it will be decided if the cause has some supernatural origin or not. If this is the case then a nocturnal seance must be organised which will be held when the patient and his or her family have managed to find the material necessary for the ceremony: rice, egg, coloured powders, incense, sometimes fruit and sweets and an animal for the sacrifice which is usually a cock or chicken. On the night of the *puja*, the patient and observers will either go to the house of the *pande* or to that of the patient. After sundown the preparations begin and while this is going on everyone smokes and talks and the *pande* places the altar on the ground with any offerings of food on metal plates or leaves. During this preparatory phase complicated cosmic designs can be made such as those already mentioned, in which case the design will show a map of the areas in the cosmos to which the *pande*'s soul will travel. These designs are extremely

complicated, though rare, and can take hours to make. Everything must be perfect, the *pande* cannot allow himself to make mistakes and if one of the lines is not traced out correctly the *pande* must first mentally excuse himself with the supernatural beings and this excuse will be repeated in the chants used at a later stage. Tulo Kancha and his assistants actually destroyed two walls of the hut as he felt there was not enough room to finish the design properly.

After this preparatory phase when the *pande* is fully concentrated on his work, the chants and invocations to the guru and friendly divinities begin and the *pande* puts on his necklaces, the bandolier of bells and takes the drum which he usually strokes for a few minutes as if he wanted to make it come alive. The *puja* starts with the first beats of the drum and the slow and generally well formulated chants list and ask help of various supernatural beings. After some time the first trances commence during which various supernatural beings, usually friendly, will enter the body of the *pande* thus ensuring their help and confirming their presence. At this point the trances are not usually long and do not generally last more than ten minutes. This is then followed by a brief pause during which the *pande* will take off his necklaces and drink, smoke and talk to those present of everyday matters which often have nothing to do with the seance itself. The *puja* can then continue with the divinatory phase which only takes place if the cause of a patient's illness has not been established beforehand. In all the Chepang encountered divination is carried out in more or less the same fashion: the drum is placed on the ground with the membrane uppermost and the *pande* will throw some grains of rice onto this and interpret the shadows and imperceptible movements of the latter. Divination may be repeated several times for the same patient or even for others present at the ceremony who may have asked for information about their future or about lost persons or possessions. Another form of divination used is when the *pande* looks attentively into the *ring* and tries to make out the images of the divinity who has caused the illness or look for answers to questions asked of him by those present.

This is followed by chants thanking the divinities, more trances and then another pause which is usually accompanied by the smoking of one or two cigarettes and a glass of *raksi*. If no cosmic design has been made before the beginning of the *puja*, it may be necessary for the *pande* to trace out the image of the divinity or spirit who has kidnapped the soul of the patient on the ground with rice and coloured powders. We then move into the main phase of the *puja*:. After finishing the design the *pande* again takes up the drum and, in a state of trance, travels to the Heavens or Underworld in order to bargain and fight for the kidnapped soul and seek alliances with divinities and friendly spirits. The soul of the drum accompanies him faithfully and so do many of his assistant spirits. It is believed that once the supernatural being which has caused the condition has agreed to accept the blood of the sacrificial animal in the place of that of the human, it will come to the world of humans and sit directly on top of the design which represents it. It is often accompanied by malefic spirits which also sit in a corner of the room. This phase is obviously followed with great apprehension by all present and the tension is fuelled by the *pande* himself who will sometimes look flatteringly and sometimes threateningly at various places where the dangerous demons not visible to the human eye are believed to be sitting.

No design is made on the ground when a witch or wizard is found to be the cause of an illness though small designs are done in red and black powder on eggs and this is believed to function as a buffer for any type of black magic.

When the cause of the condition has been established and if an agreement has been reached with the supernatural beings responsible, the illness is removed from the

body of the patient. The two main causes of illness are when souls are kidnapped or magic arrows sent to the patient by witches or wizards. In both cases and particularly in the latter case the illness is taken from the body of the patient and transferred to another living being. Arrows and magic weapons require the use of the drum, the membrane of which is repeatedly stroked over the body of the patient, particularly over the afflicted areas. The *ring* acts as a sort of magnet which attracts the magic arms and removes them from the body of the patient.

This in itself is not sufficient as the illness or cause of the crisis must be transferred to another body as supernatural beings never grant any favours without receiving something in return and require that a sacrifice be made in exchange for releasing the soul. The sacrificial animal is therefore passed over the body like the drum and must eat some grains of rice from the hands or head of the patient.

Once the illness or crisis has been transferred to the animal, it must agree to be sacrificed: the *pande* puts some water on its head: if the animal shakes its head, which is almost inevitable, this means that it agrees to the sacrifice and it is then decapitated. Its blood is then put on the design if one has been made or in places usually outside the dwelling where it can be consumed by the spirits who have participated in the ceremony. This phase is followed by the leave taking phase where the *pande* dance quickly and destroy the design with their feet, thus banishing the spirits to their world and closing the door between the worlds of gods and humans. The final chants in the *puja* are leave-taking ones which also thank all those gods and spirits who have participated in the ceremony and more trances can take place in this period.

In general the therapeutic *puja* held by the Chepang *pande* do not last long and can average anything from two to four or five hours. Generally speaking when this type of seance is held at the *pande*'s house anyone can attend and at the end of the *puja* the *pande*, though visibly tired, will stand and chat with those who have attended and give explanations to the patients and talk about various matters with them.

Illness is never considered to be limited to the patient alone, nor to his family or those present. The concept of illness does not entail physical suffering: the latter is interpreted as being a sign of imbalance, the proof of a crisis which, though it begins with the individual, then involves the whole community and causes anxiety and great tension.

The somewhat theatrical aspect of the shamanic seance allows the story of the relations between humans and god, between the known and the unknown and between life and death to be told to the spectators in the space of a few hours by means of the frequent ills which affect individuals living in conditions of extreme poverty.

The *pande* is a hero, warrior, therapist, traveller to other worlds and levels and knows secrets which common mortals do not, he is the only person who can maintain the equilibrium between all the levels and when conducting seances he is much more than a simple therapist. In order to cure an illness it is not sufficient to eliminate the symptoms, one must understand and remove the cause at root and demonstrate this to all present even though the *pande*'s own life and health may be at risk.

Some have compared the shaman to a psychotherapist though this is somewhat hazardous as the shaman personally participates in his work and can hardly be compared to one whose role is to listen in silence. In a psychotherapy session the protagonist is the patient who is invited to speak and describe his tensions, while the patient's role in the shamanic *puja* is minimal and he may often be absent altogether or only appear at the moment in which the sacrifice is being made. The shaman has the principal role almost to the exclusion of all others and it would therefore be

unwise to apply psychiatric or psychoanalytic definitions to contexts and situations which are so different from each other.

Like the shamans in many other parts of the world, the *pande* uses his actions and knowledge to stage and formulate the deepest tensions of the human soul. In a group where almost nothing is known of bacteria and virus and where illness is not generally termed to be of physiological nature, any type of suffering, be it physiological or psychic, immediately brings man into contact with what is unknown and unexplained.

This weight would be too much for any normal mortal to bear, mainly because it is believed that they have no way of counteracting supernatural will and no arms to protect themselves with. Luckily for them the gods decided to create the *pande*, those men and women who can use their knowledge to interpret signs and symptoms and therefore find solutions to crisis situations which are both individual and collective. Patients and whole communities have great faith in the *pande* and very often illnesses are cured in that the soul itself can be retrieved and the magic arrows directed by wicked witches can be removed by holding various rituals. Where there is faith, one could say that there will be a cure or a solution for and dissipation of tensions and anxiety otherwise unbearable for humans. It is perhaps in this sense that one should talk of the effectiveness of the cure, leaving to one side the western idea, not shared by many groups in other parts of the world, that one should measure effectiveness by the elimination of the symptoms of various illnesses.

Many patients who turn to the *pande* are cured, even from illnesses which would appear to be quite serious. These cures are difficult to explain and we may never be able to understand the mechanisms which can lead to the curing of various illnesses without the use of medicines of any kind though this is perhaps of little import.

It is, however, important to recognise the primary role of the shaman and his extraordinary capacity to resolve the most complicated of situations and restore equilibrium and serenity to the individual and the world surrounding him.

### **The *pande* in the role of the psychopomp**

Though M. Eliade does not consider shamanic cures to be very important and therefore does not refer much to the shaman as therapist, he does spend some time discussing the function of the shaman as psychopomp.

In many Siberian and Altaic groups the shaman only accompanies the soul of a deceased person to the other world if the latter appears to be unwilling to leave the world of the living, in which case this could endanger the whole community. He believes this function was preceded by another, earlier one in which the shaman functioned as a psychopomp and would accompany all souls to the other world<sup>272</sup>.

In some groups in the area of the Himalayas and Nepal in particular the *jhakri* will only accompany the soul to the other world if it is restless or too attached to its earthly possessions and relatives. This is the case with the Limbu<sup>273</sup> who believe the soul makes its own way on the dangerous journey to the Underworld where terrible ferocious demons live and only restless souls can be accompanied by *jhakri*.

Those cases in which the shaman's presence is required in Nepal, as is the case in Siberia and many other parts of the world, are usually accidental and violent deaths where the souls of the deceased remain on the Earth in the world of humans to whom

<sup>272</sup> Eliade, M. 1951, op. cit., (Italian Edition 1983: pp.232 - 233).

<sup>273</sup> Jones, R. L. 1976, op. cit. pp.43 - 44.

they cause many problems and much suffering. These are souls which, because of the nature of their death which is considered to be unnatural, cannot find rest in the world of humans nor can they go to that of their ancestors and this liminal situation is extremely dangerous.

In his description of the Limbu, R. L. Jones describes the different funerals which are held for those who have died natural deaths, have died in suicides or some form of accident. These types of funeral are exactly the same as common funerals though everything is inverted: the bodies are buried far off in the jungle and not in cemeteries in the village; all the openings are closed and the corpse is placed face down though corpses are usually buried in supine position.

In the event that these souls should cause harm to the living, the *pande* must 'kill' them or render them harmless for a certain period of time though it is difficult for them to be taken to the land of the ancestors.

One must not forget that almost all ethnic groups in Nepal declare themselves to be either of Hindu or Buddhist religion though they may retain shamanic beliefs and customs and this means that many turn to Hindu priests or lamas for all rites of passage, funerals in particular.

An interesting exception to this is the Gurung, studied by D. A. Messerschmidt, in the district of Lamjung <sup>274</sup>, for whom funerals are one of the most important occasions when the whole community comes together in that these ceremonies can be carried out by *jhakri*, lama or both at the same time. A certain number of days after burial has taken place a ceremony called *pai* is held during which the soul of the deceased is definitively sent away from the world of humans<sup>275</sup>. If the *pai* is celebrated by both a shaman, called *khepre* in Gurung, and a lama contemporaneously, each one will be responsible for placating and controlling various divinities and malefic spirits. According to Gurung belief, when someone dies, the soul of the deceased is captured by the demons of the Underworld from whom it must be retrieved during the *pai* ceremony in order for it to be accepted into the world of the ancestors.

The destination of the souls of the deceased varies according to different ethnic groups, and sometimes even within the same ethnic groups where contradictory beliefs may be found which can also vary from one individual to another<sup>276</sup>.

This fact is not surprising given that there are theories throughout Nepal which believe each individual to have many different souls and it is therefore easy for each soul to follow different destinies and paths as is the case in Siberia and many other parts of the world.

Not only do the different souls of an individual have different destinies but one soul can also go to different places.

In the Ket studied by E. A. Alekseenko, it is believed that men also have an invisible part to them which has seven souls (*an*) as well as the visible part which consists of the body. The *an* are immortal and destined to reincarnate into different forms. Apart from the *an*, there are also the *ul'vej* which are a sort of shadow soul, which is separate from the others but which has its own body. The destiny of the *ul'vej*, after the person it has belonged to has died, is never seen in one particular way

<sup>274</sup> Messerschmidt, D. A. 1976. Ethnographic Observation of Gurung Shamanism in Lamjung District. In Hitchcock, J. T. and Jones, R. L. (eds), *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*. Warminster: Aris and Phillips Ltd: 197 - 216.

<sup>275</sup> See also Pignéde, B. 1966. *Les Gurungs: une Population Himalayenne du Nepal*. Paris: Mouton and Co.

<sup>276</sup> This has been noted by several scholars, but mainly by Jones, R. L. 1976, op.cit. p.44.

and can vary: it is believed that the *ul'vej* can stay with the divinities in their world or remain in the grave with the bones of the deceased; it can also be transformed into a malefic being, go up to the Heavens with the last dying breath of the deceased and may even remain on the Earth and replicate the life of the deceased<sup>277</sup>.

To return to the area of the Himalayas, there is an interesting ethnic minority in Yunnan, the Na-khi, who believe that all men have nine souls and women seven: the main souls are the same for both, the *o*, the *ha*, and the *hu*. The first soul is the one which, if frightened away from or kidnapped by malefic spirits, will make the individual ill and can even make him die if it does not re-enter the body. When death comes, the three souls have different destinies: the *hu* perishes once and for all when the vital forces are lost; the *ha* will take on another form and the *o* must be accompanied to the land of the ancestors<sup>278</sup>.

It is interesting that in Chepang Shamanism no other religious specialist apart from the *pande* takes part in the funeral ceremony or is present at the moment of death or cremation or inhumation which follows. Nor does anyone else participate in the ceremony which is usually held thirteen days later to seal the definitive distancing of the soul. This is quite rare in Nepal and the *pande* are also responsible for accompanying all the souls of the dead to the world of the ancestors, not just those which are deemed to be restless. This would seem to be in accordance with what Eliade said, that this is probably an older form of Shamanism though it must be noted that some of the beliefs surrounding the destiny of the soul after death have been influenced by Hinduism and most Chepang believe the soul is subject to karma and reincarnation.

It is believed that the soul leaves the body not long after death and this in the form of a bird, usually a mynah bird (*Gracula Religiosa*) which is only the first of eighty-four reincarnations. Eighty-four is a mystical number which appears in Buddhist tradition as well as the Hindu and Jain religions and, though the reason for this is unclear, it probably represents entirety<sup>279</sup>. After the last reincarnation which is thought to be that of a dog, the soul goes into the foetus of a pregnant woman: a man will be reborn as a woman and a woman as a man. It is believed that infant deaths are often caused by a sort of error on the part of the soul who mistakenly enters a foetus of the same sex it had belonged to previously.

When the individual the soul has been reincarnated into dies, it will not reincarnate again and will go to live in the world of the ancestors. According to many Chepang there is more than one soul and the object which undergoes the reincarnations is not exactly a soul but more of a life force while the soul goes straight to the land of the ancestors.

This is the most common theory and the one believed by most *pande* who are responsible for accompanying the soul to its final destination.

Several theories exist regarding this destination which on the surface of the matter would appear to be contrasting but which are actually compatible. The ancestors do not all live in the same place: some of them live in the West, where the sun sets;

<sup>277</sup> E. A. Alekseenko. 1977-2. Les conceptions des Ket sur l'homme, la vie et la mort. *L'Ethnographie - Voyages Chamaniques* - vol. LXXII, 7475. Paris: pp.67 - 79.

<sup>278</sup> Sani, C. 1995. I Na-khi e la tradizione sciamanica himalayana. In Mastromattei, R. (ed.), *Tremore e Potere. La condizione ecstatica nello sciamanismo himalayano*. Rome: Franco Angeli Editore: pp.197 - 239. This book also has an interesting description of the funeral of a *dto-mba*, a Na-khi religious expert which has many shamanic features.

<sup>279</sup> See: Dasgupta, S.1946, op.cit, p.234 onwards and Eliade, M. 1951, op.cit. (Italian Edition 1990., pp.282 - 290.).

while others, the worthier, live in the Underworld not far from the divinities. Some souls find it most painful to leave their worldly possessions, their land, house and family and this is why they initially refuse to leave the world of humans. Recalcitrant souls are persuaded of this need by the *pande* during complex ceremonies and it is believed that they are behind the red light which can be seen at times at sunset, and which appears when, with the help of the *pande*, they cross the threshold into the world of the ancestors which live in the West from which there is no return.

According to others, some of these souls or even a third type of soul together with the vital force which is reincarnated and the soul which goes to the land of the ancestors, decide to remain on the Earth and in this case they walk behind men, who cannot see them and for whom they do not usually pose any danger, and continue to carry out all the tasks and jobs they did when they were still alive.

The destiny of the soul of a *pande* is different to that of other men. It is believed that the *pande* are allowed to live in the world of the ancestors and divinities in the *patal* or with the guru who were responsible for initiating them. The *pande* ancestors are believed to have a privileged destiny compared to that of other men. This may be because they can go to the *patal* in which case they will live separately and in nicer places than other men or will go straight to the houses of the divinities. The *pande* may also continue to live in the world of humans, with the *ban-jhakri* in the jungles though they remain invisible. Those *pande* whose childhood gurus are believed to have been the sun or moon are thought to be accompanied by two divine stars in whose carriage they will reside for eternity.

The life force of a dead *pande*, wherever its soul may be, will always go into another *pande* who must belong to the same family: preference is given to sons, then nephews, sons of the brothers of the *pande* and then grandsons in the male line. Following on from that one will find the direct descendants in the sisters and daughters of a *pande*.

It is firmly believed by all that in any case an ancestor *pande*'s power will remain in the family and this, though rare, may include any female members of the family, any sisters or daughters of the shaman who have married outwith the group and entered that of her husband. Though this change is accepted by all it does not apply to transference of powers and knowledge from the ancestor who, according to Chepang belief, continues to believe that his own sisters and daughter are descended from the latter, as if they were from the same group.

Whatever the final destination may be and irrespective of whether the funeral is for a *pande* or a commoner, the *pande* must hold a complex ritual which is always held at night and during which it must first call the soul which has been wandering freely about the Earth and Heavens for thirteen days and then, after it has been fed with offerings of its favourite food, the soul must be accompanied to the place where its ancestors are waiting. The ancestors will then lead it to the divinities who will assign it a place and lodgings.

The *pande* believe these seances are very dangerous and they fear for their lives: the road is described as having many obstacles and dangers. The *pande* tell of having to cross eight control posts, fifty-two tongues of fire and fifty-three dangerous fords, all of which takes place in storms and strong winds which could blow the two souls away and take them to fearful and unknown places.

One of the main tasks of the *pande* throughout the trip is to reassure the soul of the deceased which may be terrified and want to turn back and he must do this until the ancestors belonging to the family of the deceased are called up by the *pande* and

prepare a banquet for the new arrival. When the ancestors take over there is no danger of the soul returning to the land of humans, which the *pande* must return to.

After the funeral *puja* has finished the *pande* appear tired and many tell of how they have fallen ill with sudden fevers which can last anything up to a few days<sup>280</sup>.

In April 1995 I attended a ceremony held to distance the soul of a little girl who died shortly after she had been born. Children under the age of ten are never usually cremated and are usually buried in the jungle with a shorter ceremony<sup>281</sup>. In this case, the little girl was the great-granddaughter of the old *pande* Narcing Praja who, after having carried out divinations which revealed that her soul could have become a demon which would have put her family's life in danger, decided to hold a full ceremony during which he not only accompanied the soul of the child to the land of the ancestors but also decided, after having consulted the parents of the child who already had another three children, to 'kill' the uterus of the mother for whom any further pregnancies would have been very risky.

The young mother of the deceased who was the wife of the *pande*'s grandson and about twenty years old, had begun to lose blood in the fifth month of her pregnancy. As they lived in a village which was four or five hours walk from the main road, her husband and other relatives had taken her to the hospital at Hetauda. When the woman was seen by the doctor she was in the seventh month of her pregnancy and, according to the husband, the doctor on duty did not examine her and after a brief conversation told the girl and her relatives that he could do nothing and advised them to go to the hospital at Birganji where they might perhaps have been in a position to help her. This hospital is around five hours travel by bus from Hetauda, the roads are not good and it would certainly not have been good for a pregnant woman to travel, especially since she had a haemorrhage at the time and, moreover, the relatives did not have the money for the trip. The doctor quickly dismissed the woman and gave her twenty 500 mg antibiotic tablets free of charge and told her to take four a day until she was able to travel to Birganji.

The whole family was desolated and disillusioned by this and returned to the village, carrying the girl in a basket. Her condition had worsened because of the trip which had entailed hours of walking along steep mountain paths and crossing the fifty metre ford of a freezing river on foot.

I arrived in the village three days after this had happened and that very evening the *pande* Narcing Praja decided to hold a *puja* which he had not yet held as the family had been unable to obtain a sacrificial chicken. When he saw the desperate condition the woman was in, Narcing decided to attempt to hold the *puja* and explained to the divinities that for the moment they had not been able to find a chicken in exchange for the souls of the woman and child in the hope that they would show clemency and he promised that the sacrifice would be made within the next two days.

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<sup>280</sup> I have never attended the funeral of a *pande* nor the ceremony during which his soul is distanced. This ceremony has been described as being even more challenging and dangerous than those held for commoners. In fact, the *pande* holding the ceremony has to call all the divinities and spirits with whom his colleague would usually work and pacify them and try to convince them to return to their places as their interlocutor for the human world has left it. This ceremony is supposed to be very dangerous and can only be held by the most powerful and knowledgeable of *pande* in that it is believed that the spirits could easily be angered and then create problems for the village and its inhabitants. In some rare cases all the divinities and spirits which belonged to the dead *pande* can decide to transfer to the *pande* holding the ceremony though in six years of research I have only heard of two cases of this type.

<sup>281</sup> The souls of stillborn children are not believed to travel to the land of ancestors as they go to live with the goddess Babi-Ama who determines the destiny of children being born and writes this on the inside of their forehead. In these cases no actual rites are held though the house is purified.

The woman, whose condition was serious, did not take part in the seance and remained in her habitation while the *pande* held the ceremony in her absence for her and her unborn child. The *puja* lasted a couple of hours and the *pande* sent his soul to make an agreement with the divinities of the *akas* and the *patal*. At the end of the seance, Narcing was visibly relieved though very tired and said that he had managed to pacify the divinities at least for the moment.

That same night, the young woman's contractions arrived and she gave birth to a girl who died a few hours later, probably as she had been weakened because of the extremely high dose of antibiotics administered to the mother.

The body of the newborn child was immediately buried in the jungle not far from the dwelling and the young mother's relatives went to Narcing Praja to hear what he had to say on the matter. Narcing was sad to hear of the death of his great-granddaughter and said that during a divination held in the course of the previous *puja* he had discovered that the newborn girl could, if she died, become an extremely dangerous demon as she wanted to stay on the Earth with her brothers and sisters and would cause misfortune to fall on the whole family.

The *pande* decided to hold a full funeral for the girl and personally take her soul to the land of the ancestors so as to prevent any danger of that happening. The *puja* was held in the house of the child's parents a few days after the body had been buried, as is usually the case in such ceremonies, and began immediately after sundown.

Before the *puja* started, Narcing ordered some of the family to purify the area which was done by smearing cow dung over the damp floor. The *pande* then finished off the process by taking water which *mantras* had been whispered over and sprinkling it over the inside walls and those present, especially the parents of the child.

During the seance the soul of the girl was called and given an egg<sup>282</sup> by her great grandfather and then taken to the land of ancestors. The main part of the chants reported here is extremely important in that it allows us to understand the ritual and shows how a soul is distanced. It is also, for the moment, the only evidence we have of what happens in Chepang funeral rites. Besides the *pande*, the soul of the drum plays a very important part in this type of ritual and it travels together with its owner and the soul of the deceased to protect them.

*'Soul of the drum, I am looking after some people, as I have always done.  
O Soul, take care of these people who have turned to me for help, as I have always done.  
(to the divinities) I am the young man, I have come to this place,  
I am the one who lives in these days, I have come down here.  
I am putting you into the places where I usually put you:  
in the area of the sacrifice, where the blood of animals is exchanged for the souls of humans.  
Listen, drum, listen....  
(to the dead child) What I did yesterday for the ancestors,  
I am doing for you today,  
(to the drum) I am talking about yesterday's ancestors,  
Queen of qualities, Guru of qualities,  
I call upon you, I call upon you  
(to the child) Grand-child, you have died as was your destiny,  
the destiny given to you by the stars and planets:  
your destiny has come to pass.  
I am the pande,  
you, grandchild of the pande, are dead.*

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<sup>282</sup> In the event that a child dies before it can eat solids, the funeral banquet offered to their soul always takes the form of an egg; whereas in the case of an adult, the deceased person's favourite food is used for the banquet.

*O drum, push aside the dry trees in the patal,  
 surround the area from where the sun rises to that where it sets,  
 and all the space between ;  
 be careful, this girl could become a demon,  
 she could take her mother, her parents, her sisters, her brothers or anyone else.  
 (to the girl) You cannot stay in the breast of your mother, in the breast of your father, in the breast of  
 your relatives,  
 you cannot stay.  
 You, dead soul, could still come back to see your parents !  
 (to the drum) Be careful, she must not turn back.  
 Underneath here there is a place where I usually play: I will surround this place.  
 I protect the right and left of this place.  
 (to the drum) Look down there ! Look down there !  
 (to both drum and girl) Let us go ! Let us go to the place where all dead souls are kept !  
 Tek Bahadur and Dhori Samdi<sup>283</sup>, this child is dead.  
 Dhori Aita, Bokhta<sup>284</sup>.....  
 I push the family of the deceased.  
 No, do not throw wood and stones....  
 let us play in the place where the ancestors used to play.  
 (to the drum) Guru of quality, Queen of quality,  
 listen, listen.  
 Sanjia Kumari and Dhori Banji<sup>285</sup>  
 listen, listen.....  
 Aita Ram<sup>286</sup>, Dhori Samdi,  
 listen, listen.....  
 You listen too, little dead soul.  
 Buddhi Maya<sup>287</sup>, Dhori Aita  
 listen.....  
 (the invocation to the ancestors is repeated again)  
 I am saying your names,  
 you want to have food here,  
 but I only have food for the dead girl baby.  
 Do not show your courage or I will send a flash of lightening !  
 In the same way in which I nail a piece of iron to a piece of wood,  
 I am now nailing you here.  
 I could send the soul of the drum,  
 who could kill you, beware !  
 You who have died before us cannot eat now.  
 Once a year, during Chhonam, you receive food,  
 on this day you will receive food and clothes.  
 Aita Ram, Dhori Samdi,  
 you cannot eat now:  
 this is the food for a little baby girl,  
 how could you eat this ?  
 Do not fight with me.  
 None of you can eat now.  
 Do not make me send lightening  
 to the right and left of you.  
 Without pity for the dead baby girl,  
 she would die.  
 She is also your grand-child....  
 there is not enough food.*

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<sup>283</sup> This is when the soul of the *pande* encounters those of his ancestors who are the same as those of the little girl. Tek Bahadur is the *pande*'s father-in-law, Dhori Samdi one of his sisters.

<sup>284</sup> One of the daughters and the mother-in-law of the *pande*.

<sup>285</sup> The paternal grandmother and another grand-daughter of the *pande* who died when she was young.

<sup>286</sup> Paternal grand-father of the deceased.

<sup>287</sup> Perhaps an aunt of the deceased on her mother's side.

*Be satisfied....*  
*You can call on those of your children who are still alive, your grand-children,*  
*Do not call them !!!!*  
*You, all of you, must remain in your place down here,*  
*she will not be fed together with you.*  
 (to the mother of the child) *For the foetus of other children to develop,*  
*for there to be no risk of death for other children.*  
*Sunal Ama<sup>288</sup>, yesterday you gave birth to a girl baby,*  
*like a wild potato in the forest ;*  
*the child grew like a wild potato,*  
*it grew like a domestic potato.*  
 (to the drum) *Look kindly around you, all around.*  
*Let us go into the dead room,*  
*look carefully.*  
*Let us go into the dead room,*  
*look carefully.*  
*Let us go into the dead room, look carefully.*  
*You who have died could become one who has woken from sleep:*  
*you could return to see your mother.*  
 (to the drum) *Look ! Look ! Look !*  
*the mother could have a pain in her chest, as though she was being eaten by something !!*  
 (to the child) *Eat, eat...*  
*I have pushed you, I have pushed you forever into the place where dead people play.'*

Immediately before the *pande* pushed the soul of the child into the land of the ancestors, he saw that the mother could suffer or even die if she were to become pregnant again. In the course of a pause, the shaman then asked both parents of the dead child for permission to 'kill' the uterus of the woman which both immediately agreed to.

*'I am killing Sunal Ama,*  
*I am killing you...*  
*I push all the demons,*  
*before they come back to live in the breast of this woman.*  
*I push you and nail you down,*  
*as if I were nailing a piece of iron to a piece of wood.*  
*In this family another person will die....*  
*I guarantee this !!!'*

The whole chant was interspersed with fairly long silent trances during which the souls of the *pande*, his grand-child and that of the drum went on their journey through the Underworld, the land of the ancestors. The visions seen during these trances of movement are never described by the *pande* to those present in that they are believed to be too frightening and according to the *pande* it would be impossible to find words to describe the rapid, broken images similar to those seen in dreams or more likely nightmares which it is difficult to have a clear and detailed memory of.

The relationship with ancestors is somewhat ambivalent and the first encounter with them is not reassuring. The presence of the *pande*'s soul and that of the little girl's were not immediately accepted by the ancestors who threw stones and pieces of wood at them.

The drum is the only means of controlling the situation as it offers protection and is also a potential weapon to be used against the dead souls who may be upset at not

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<sup>288</sup> Sunal Ama, or mother Sunal, is used by the Chepang to indicate the uterus.

being given offerings of food, the only food offering being that destined for the soul of the little girl.

The role of the *pande* is therefore complex and covers various levels: it involves mediation and encounters with the world of the ancestors and that of the living, in particular with the parents and siblings of the child and there is then a fight with the deceased who are initially reluctant to accept the new arrival. The *pande* must also fight the desire of the little girl to turn back and be near her parents which would mean she would be transformed into a dangerous demon.

The therapeutic *puja* have three levels, that of the body, the supernatural beings and the social level whereas in this case the situation appears to be more complex and inter-related. It starts with the death of an individual who is member of a group. The individual then involves the collective, first of all, the close relatives of the little girl and then potentially the more distant relations and from there the whole village. This situation causes a serious crisis and rather than turn to supernatural beings and divinities for help the *pande* prefers to turn to the ancestors who already belong to a different world to the human one though they did once belong to the latter.

Even the supernatural beings have their role to play. First of all it is they who have advocated the destiny which has caused the premature death of the little girl and the crisis originates from them, with the risk of the little girl being transformed into a malefic entity, a dangerous demon, thus changing her character from when she was a human.

The greatest danger would seem to lie in the fact that one level could transform itself into the other, for example, when the human could be transformed into the supernatural. This would create a profound imbalance in all levels of this delicate system and would immediately amount to a serious threat for the whole society. The *pande* must therefore find other allies to help him resolve this crisis who are not indifferent as the divinities are in this case, and turning to the ancestors allows him to restore order at the level of the individual which would have the little girl return to the world where humans go on dying accompanied by those others who have preceded her; and order is restored at the level of society in that there is no longer anything to fear. Finally, order is also restored at the supernatural level in that there will be one less demon.

If the child had been transformed into a malefic being, it would have wandered the Earth in this form, causing disturbance and bringing illnesses and ill fortune to men and animals alike. For these types of demons which are motivated by the rancour of not having lived for long enough or because they had not been satisfied with the life they had lived or because they are souls of people who have died violent or unnatural deaths as we have already examined<sup>289</sup>, the *pande* must hold seances which have a dual function. Apart from being exorcistic in nature, these seances are also funereal in that the real objective of this type of *puja* should be the definitive distancing of the tormented soul which has been transformed into a demon from the land of the living. It is very difficult to carry out this operation successfully and it is more often the case that *pande* only manage to distance the souls from the village for a period of time and the latter will probably reappear at some time in the future.

After the *pande* finally managed to make the soul of his great grand-daughter enter the world of the ancestors, and before beginning his journey back towards the land of the living, Narcing had a revelation that the young mother could die if she were to remain pregnant again and therefore it was necessary to 'kill' her uterus, which was

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<sup>289</sup> See the chapter on death and the rites connected to it.

personified in Sunal Ama, a name also given to a goddess, in order to prevent further deaths in the family.

This was also successful but at the end of the ceremony, when everything seemed to be going well, the *pande* had another dramatic premonition: another member of the family was to die soon and another journey would have to be undertaken for the soul of that person.

This news put a damper on the spirits of everyone who had begun to relax and all those belonging to the same family as the little girl began to look at each other wondering, anxiously searching each other's eyes to see who would be the next person to die.

In a very deep trance, Narcing cried bitterly and silently and murmured requests for help to friendly divinities. His voice was almost imperceptible and he was already very tired given his age and bad health, and the tension of the *puja* itself added to this. His soul began the journey back from the threshold of the land of the ancestors where it was to the land of the living. The *ring* was sounded slowly and with great force and the *pande's* trance was completely silent apart from the sound of the instrument and the ringing of the bells on the bandolier.

Narcing's eyes had remained closed for most of the time apart from one or two rapid glances which were sometimes frightened, sometimes serious, sometimes benevolent and directed at different cardinal points. On the difficult and dangerous way back the *pande* was encountering various benefic and malefic beings and also encountering many other obstacles which blocked the way between the world of the dead and the living.

Everyone present was silent and observed these last phases of the trance which lasted seven or eight minutes, though this obviously corresponded to a much longer time in shamanic terms, with great apprehension.

Narcing stopped playing the drum all of a sudden and placed the instrument down on the ground and rapidly took off his necklaces and bandolier of bells; this indicated that the *pande* had returned to Earth. Those present immediately began to talk and ask the *pande* about various things, especially about who would be the next person to die in the family.

Narcing was elusive and said he did not know the name of the person chosen, to allieviate the tension he said that it would probably be his turn to die soon as he was quite old. Slowly the situation came back to normal and the people began to talk of other things; even the mother of the little girl who had been silent up to that point and visibly suffering, then exchanged words with other women and accepted a glass of *raksi*. The discussions soon centred round memories of ancestors called up by the *pande* during the chants. Their names were mentioned several times and there were even some funny stories about the protagonist Dhori Aita, one of the *pande's* daughters who had died some years previously.

Re-establishing contact between the living and the dead brings some consolation to the former and allows frequent losses to be confronted more serenely. Thus even the young mother of the girl whose funeral had just been concluded appeared to be much relieved once the *pande* had described his encounter with the ancestors in more detail and the moment in which he had persuaded them that the little soul was not a foreigner but one of their grand-children who they were obliged to take into their care.

The mother began to smile again, secure in the knowledge that her little girl would be in the best of hands and encouraged by the fact that she would not have to go through any further suffering in the future as Narcing assured her that her uterus was

'dead' and that she would not remain pregnant again. Even the woman's husband began to smoke and laugh with the others present and pronounced himself relieved at the prospect of not having other children apart from the three he already had as it was extremely difficult to know what he would have done if he had had to provide for other children.

After this long pause, Narcing took up the drum again and sang a brief chant thanking the divinities and taking leave of those divinities who protected him and his assistant spirits while the others continued to chat.

When the chant had finished Narcing ordered a boy to throw an egg out of the habitation into the jungle so as to satisfy and ward off any eventual malefic beings which could have been attracted by the sound of the *ring*.

At the end of the *puja* they chatted on for a while: Narcing left immediately and returned to his dwelling which was about half an hour's walk away as he was tired and visibly affected; the young woman lay down on a mat with her three children and went to sleep almost straight away.

The next day serenity appeared to have been restored to the village and the inhabitants returned to their normal daily activities. Narcing had a fever for several days but his condition soon improved as did that of the young mother.

For the moment the danger had been averted and order re-established.

## **The two main Chepang festivals: the Chhonam and the Namrung puja.**

This final chapter has been dedicated to the description of the two main annual Chepang festivals which are important occasions on which all those belonging to the ethnic group can meet and gather together.

The Chhonam Festival, as it is called in Chepang, is also known by the name *Nwagi* which is the Nepali term (T354b) used to describe the first of the rice harvests and is also used to describe those festivals during which offerings from the first harvest are made.

Chhonam is celebrated in the month of Bhado<sup>290</sup>, usually when there is a full moon and its main aim is to present the divinities in the *patal* and the ancestors with offerings of the fruit of the first harvest before it is used for human consumption.

The Chhonam is also an occasion on which all the village inhabitants and those belonging to other ethnic groups will meet and pay homage to the *pande* who are a central and vital part of the festivities.

The ceremony is always held at the *pande*'s house, never anywhere else and, although the highest point of the festival is always during the one night, the preparations for the festival begin two days previous to this and the festival does not actually end until three or five days later.

More than one Chhonam Festival may be held in the same village, depending on the number of shamans present, as there is usually more than one. However, it is often the case that various *pande* decide to celebrate the occasion together in which case the festival will take place in the house of the most powerful *pande*.

Two days previous to or on the day before the festival the *pande* of the house will hold a private ceremony during which, after everything has been prepared for the decoration of the altar which will take place during the festival itself, the *pande* will recite chants and invocations for the divinities and ancestors which function as a form of invitation to the festival though the *pande* does not actually enter into trance and the drum is not used at any point.

The main phase of the Chhonam starts at sunset and lasts till the next morning, sometimes even until the early hours of the afternoon.

When the sun sets the *pande* begin to decorate the altar in their habitation and prepare the offerings, all of which will take them two or three hours: banana trees are brought and placed round the walls. Bunches of rice seedlings which have been tied together are then placed under the banana trees. This rice is known as *ghaiya* (T155b) and grows in land which is not flooded.

This operation requires great care and attention and the plants must not lose any of their grains before the festival begins as this would be interpreted as a sign of bad luck. Several plates of offerings are then placed in front of the banana trees. These contain offerings of fruit, lemons, apples, bananas and oranges along with any other product which has been recently produced or harvested. *Raksi*, a liquor distilled from barley or meal, is always present and will be drunk in large quantities by all those present during the course of the night.

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<sup>290</sup> According to our calendar, Bhado falls in the period between the second half of August and the first half of September.

All the vegetable offerings must be in unprocessed form and must have been touched as little as possible by humans: the *ghaiya* rice in particular is considered to be particularly sacred in that its roots are believed to reach into the *patal* from where it is thought to obtain its nutrition. The *ghaiya*, like the other types of vegetables, is believed to belong to the divine Underworld and man's consumption of these products is considered to be a concession made by the divinities who must therefore be given the first offerings.

These offerings are also made to the divinities and ancestors who are thought to use the vegetables to plant out their fields rather than for food. The offerings have a double function: they are used to pay homage to the divinities who created them and who are the effective owners as well as being used to re-establish close contact between the world of humans and that of the ancestors who are given seeds which can be used for cultivation.

The decoration of the altar is a delicate matter in that it is used to recreate a scene as similar as possible to that in which the divinities of the *patal* live, which is believed to be full of forests and banana trees and which is symbolised by the two plants placed inside the habitation. All the offerings and other items necessary for the seance are displayed in such a way as to maintain the principles of beauty and harmony. This preparation is followed with great apprehension. The onlookers marvel at the representation of the land of the divinities appearing before their eyes, a place where the divinities are believed to remain for the duration of the ceremony.

In the course of the preparations for the ceremony and, indeed, all through the night, people come to the *pande*'s house with offerings of rice, *raksi* and, depending on the state of their finances, one or more chickens or cockerels. The rice brought by the onlookers is not *ghaiya* and often from an earlier harvest: it is *acheta* (T8a), a Nepali word used to describe rice used for offerings, usually rice which has grown in water. This is not intended as an offering for the divinities or ancestors which only the *pande* may address in his function as spokesperson for the whole community, but is for the *pande* himself who receives tributes and offers from the inhabitants of the village and those belonging to other ethnic groups on this special occasion.

There are several other phases in the Chhonam. Once the preparation of the altar has been completed the *pande* beat their drums and ask the divinities to leave their world and come to that of the humans. During these invocations, the story of how the world was created is narrated, both to teach the younger generations the myth and remind the adults of it while praising the powers of the divinities who, on hearing their story narrated, quickly come to take their place beside the altar where they are believed to remain for the course of the whole festival though only the *pande* can see them. The long narration and invocations are followed by a pause during which everyone drinks, chats and laughs. The *puja* then continues and various plates of offerings are given to the ancestors: the divinities are thought to come to Earth though the ancestors do not and the *pande* must travel to their world.

This is easily explained by the fact that the souls of the deceased are not allowed to return to the world of humans except in the form of dangerous demons and therefore the *pande* must go into a state of trance and travel to the land of the ancestors, not to accompany the soul of a deceased person but to take them the offerings given to them by humans. The Chepang have a saying which states that all married women must return to their parent's home once a year so as to pay homage to their parents and in the same way the *pande* go to visit deceased relatives and acquaintances during Chhonam.

After further pauses and well into the night, the novice *pande* are presented and the consensus of the community and more expert *pande* must be obtained. In theory anyone who has had premonitory dreams or has been instructed by supernatural spirits during sleep can ask to beat the *ring* which cannot be denied to anyone. However, generally speaking, it is usually only those young people whose vocation and calling is known to all the community who will come forward.

The expert *pande* keep vigil, control and guide the actions of the novices with great attention. They encourage them and protect them from any eventual attacks by malign spirits or angered divinities.

The presentation of the young *pande* can last for some time depending on the number of candidates, the length of their trance and their ability to hold the attention of the public who, after a while, want to move on to the next two phases of the Chhonam: the divinations and therapies.

This day is unique in that all the main divinities are in the same habitation as the people gathered there and all the ancestors are looking down on the events taking place on the Earth and can recognise their relatives and acquaintances. This event only happens one night a year and is used by everyone to ask for predictions about future events and cure all types of illnesses, particularly those which have been long-term conditions.

The *pande* also receive predictions about matters which directly concern them, which they themselves manifest by falling into states of deep trance during which the divinities are thought to be able to enter them and speak through them.

During the course of the year, the *pande* prefer to postpone particularly grave cases to the Chhonam when anyone can come forward and ask to be cured, as long as he has a sacrificial animal. The therapeutic phase, which usually starts any time between three and five in the morning, can last a long time and be particularly intense as tens of people have to be given cures which all depend on the type of supernatural spirit which is thought to have caused the condition and some cures can last for hours. Some sacrifices of chickens take place during each individual treatment but in the event that particularly seriously ill patients bring offerings of goats, these are always killed in the morning, far from the habitation on the bank of a river or in the jungle according to the position of the village.

After the sacrifices have been made, several assistants disembowel and prepare the animals which will be cooked a little later on and shared out amongst those present.

The *pande* give the last of the offerings to the ancestors and divinities and then take leave of them by means of long chants during which the names of all the supernatural beings who have taken part must be mentioned in order to thank them for their intervention and ask for protection and ensure that they return to their resting places.

The altar must not be touched for another three to five days so as to allow the ancestors and divinities to have access to the various offerings and at the end of this period there is a second leave taking which the *pande* will hold another *puja* for, though this will only last a few hours. This is the final leave taking from those divinities who have intervened in the ceremony.

Throughout the night young people gather together outside the house of the *pande* in the course of the festivities and, to the sound of a drum called *madal* (T503a) which is usually used for festivities in Nepal, they will form two groups, one of girls and one of boys, and sing courting songs while dancing to the light of the fires which have been lit for the occasion. Marriages are contracted during this ceremony and the boys will ask the girl of their choice if they agree to elope with them, an act which is recognised by the community as one of marriage.

I myself have attended four Chhonam, in four different years, in different areas and districts and can guarantee that the events and phases have always taken place exactly as described in brief above.

The Chhonam I have decided to describe in more detail took place on 7 September 1992 in the district of Makwanpur and was conducted by the *pande* Hare and Krishora who later worked together with me in the translation of the chants and assisted in the interpretation of the various stages of the ceremony.

As we have already said, the Chhonam is also attended by other ethnic groups and translation often becomes arduous as the *pande* speak different languages. At the same time, during the chants they use the language typical of the shamans which is broken and often difficult to understand. In this particular case Hare and Krishora sung both in Chepang and Nepali and would often address the large public during pauses or divinations in Chepang, Newari, Hindu, Tamang or Nepali according to the case at hand.

Hare and Krishora live fairly near the asphalt road which links India and Nepal, and, because they are highly respected, all the other ethnic groups which live nearby turn to them for help, both from villages which are fairly near at hand as well as from the city of Hetauda. Over the years the *pande* have learnt many languages so as to be able to communicate better with those who turn to them for help.

In the days before the high point of the big nocturnal *puja*, the *pande* collected the essentials for the ceremony, particularly the *ghaiya* rice seedlings which had to be tied up into bundles and could not lose any of their grains. At sunset on the evening of the Chhonam they began to dress the altar with great care and attention and placed one of the banana trees they had prepared that same morning against the wall opposite the entrance of the habitation. The ears of rice were placed at the foot of the banana tree in vertical position and numerous metal plates of offerings were set out with other offerings such as *acheta*, fruit and sweets which had been brought along by those attending the ceremony, along with incense, nutmegs and coloured powders. Mats were set out on the ground of the small, one-roomed habitation to allow the public to be seated more comfortably; the heat was suffocating.

It took about an hour and a half to decorate the altar during which time lots of people arrived at the house of the *pande*. The youngest took their places outside the habitation and split up into two groups of girls and boys and immediately began their courtship chants to the sound of the *madal* and the singing and dancing continued right on until the morning.

Hare and Krishora shared the same *ring*, bandolier of bells, *kala mala* and *rudraksha mala* and exchanged the various ritual objects throughout the night, substituting each other in the sounding of the drum. The ceremony began with chants and invocations to the divinities recounted by Krishora:

*'O gods, I am at your service: I am not lying.*  
*Do not joke: I am not joking.*  
*I am saying good things. I am calling on the gods of the patal to give me their support.*  
*Do not be angry: we have begun to call you !*  
*Be good and kind and enjoy yourselves.*  
*Chase out the black magic ! A witch might come in: chase her out!*  
*Look kindly: the bhut or pret might come. Look at them !*  
*An attack may come from any side: protect my faith!*  
*Chase out the black magic!*  
*My knowledge and yours could be disturbed by something...*  
*The bhut, the pret, the witches could come !*  
*Listen: let's look at what is happening.*

*Listen ! Listen !  
 Listen, I am calling you;  
 The witches cannot defeat me, nothing can.  
 Why are you bowing your head so sadly?  
 I am asking the gods and goddesses for help  
 Gods and goddesses of the patal, the Underworld, I am asking for your help !'*

There is a certain ambivalence surrounding the night of the Chhonam. On the one hand it is the best moment in the twelve month period in which to attempt to solve problems and cure serious illnesses for which little can be done in the course of the year, and on the other hand the divinities are not the only ones believed to gather together on the Earth, malign spirits and entities could also be enticed by the food and the sounding of the *ring*. The *pande* confirm that their lives are in the greatest danger during Chhonam as there is always a certain risk in establishing contact with so many divinities at the same time in that some supernatural being may take offence at the slightest mistake and decide to take revenge for this by taking possession of the soul of the *pande*. As we have already seen the danger for commoners is different to that for shamans who have to both beware of making mistakes and angering the gods and protect the public from any eventual attacks by malign spirits or witches.

Again everything revolves around the *pande* and he alone is responsible for maintaining the delicate equilibrium: he must create alliances with the divinities so that they will help him to repel any eventual attacks from enemies against the community. If the *pande* were to make a mistake, the whole community would be in great danger.

Once Krishora finished her chant, Hare continued with invocations and requests for help:

*'(To the divinities) I ask you to be intelligent.  
 God of the drum and other divinities: I am trying to gather you together in this place.  
 An enemy may arrive in this house. Look out !  
 Protect the children !  
 Gods, goddesses, make sure your souls are strong.  
 You must not go up the mountains today:  
 my soul and your souls must not leave.  
 Today the souls must stay together in the refuge of the gods.  
 A witch might come, check carefully !  
 Other jhakri could come and put our knowledge to the test.  
 The people who are gathered together here could have problems: watch out !  
 (To the drum) Your skin is your clothing, look after it !  
 if you lose it, you might have to wander about naked !  
 (To the gods) Some brothers may have arrived before me.  
 I might be late. Please do not be angry with me for this !  
 Do not wander about in the little springs today !  
 Please stay here by my side.  
 Someone may come from the place where the sun sets.  
 When a sick person is cured, the condition may return.  
 Shaking violently. Shaking: though not because it is the will of the body.  
 He is getting hot !  
 Death, you may not enter here: this is the world of humans,  
 Be careful ! You might fall !  
 Today you gods and goddesses may not go into the patal.  
 Gods of the akas and the patal, gather together !  
 You will be in the hands of a dead man, in the hands of a bayu and a bir: get up !  
 (To the banana trees) Do not move !  
 (To the rice plants) Stay together at the foot of the banana trees !  
 Someone may be affected by black magic: so stay here !*

*If other pande steal this rice, we will die.  
People are arriving, furious.  
A sad person could come.  
Gods, goddesses, I bring you this message:*

.....  
*I invite you here from the patal: do not be angry.  
You may be tired of hearing the problems of humans  
and want to leave this place: please, let that not be the case !  
Do not let anyone speak !  
Excuse those who did not come last year,  
Have some compassion for those who are not here this year !'*

As we can see from the above chant there is another danger for the *pande*, that other *jhakri* may come to test the power and knowledge of their colleagues. Other *pande*, adversaries, may arrive and if they were to be able to steal the rice plants, this would mean certain death for the *pande* holding the Chhonam. As we have already seen, though rivalry between *pande* or between *pande* and *jhakri* is rare, it is greatly feared as it will inevitably mean a battle between forms of magic which usually ends with one of the two protagonists dying. This is perhaps the only concrete earthly danger for the *pande* who have little else to fear from humans.

The role played by the *ghaiya* would seem to be of fundamental importance: the ears of rice must be protected so that they are touched by humans as little as possible and must not be taken by other *pande* who may be jealous. Not one little grain of rice may fall from these as this would offend the superior beings. The rice must be in perfect condition when it is presented to them by the *pande* so that they may receive food which is as pure as possible and the ancestors, who will also receive the harvest offering, will be able to have perfect seeds for their crops.

The chants of invocation were followed by a pause which lasted about forty minutes during which all the adults chatted, smoked and drank *raksi*. The *pande* recited an abbreviated form of the long myth recounting how the world was created which was listened to with great interest by all those present. Krishora was now ready to present some of the harvest offerings to the divinities who by now were judged to have arrived and have taken their places in the room. The *pande* again put on the ritual necklaces and recommenced the sounding of the drum:

*'I am asking for your mercy, gods of the patal !  
Gauthani <sup>291</sup>, Sun and Moon, protect me.  
Protect me, o guru, gods of the akas, of the patal, eighty-four guru.  
Arrows and witches could come.  
The four rakshasa could come.  
The eighty-four kings and four mashan could arrive !  
This is why I am asking you for help, guru.  
Any bir could arrive and play,  
Any pret could arrive and play,  
One hundred pisac could arrive and play !  
The bir and the bayu could arrive in the form of a wind.  
You, Tiwasé, Batisé, look out !  
I am giving you an offering of some new food !  
The bayu might come up !  
The bir might come up !  
The mashan might come up !  
I am ready to come with you !  
I am ready to come with you !'*

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<sup>291</sup> This is a local divinity.

After having presented the offerings on the ground, the *pande* must then journey to the Underworld in person to take these gifts made by humans to the land of the divinities and that of the ancestors. In the course of several trances, Krishora journeyed to the Heavens and Underworld together with the divinities who had ensured that she would have their protection and only when she had completed her mission did she return to the land of humans along with the divinities. She was quite exhausted and had a long rest, something to drink and then recounted some of her visions to those present who listened attentively.

She also briefly told of her encounter with the ancestors who she described as having dressed specially for the occasion, and described how they had asked for news of those of their relatives still alive whom they recommended should not forget to make offerings to them and pay homage every Chhonam.

Outside the habitation the chants and dances of the young ones continued uninterrupted and their amusement together with the general laughter which resulted from several apt comments made on the part of both sides became more and more intense as they drank more and more *raksi*: this was definitely a more earthly reality.

Even the old *pande* who appeared to be in a good mood as the offerings made to the divinities and ancestors had been successful went outside and danced amongst the laughing young people, joking with them and finding out whether new couples had been formed or if any promises of marriage had been made.

Back inside, the two *pande* moved on to the next phase in the ceremony. This phase was mentioned in the chapter on initiation and the call to the profession: it was the moment in which the novice *pande*, the *cela*, were presented to the community. Three *cela* succeeded one another and were attentively observed and encouraged by the *pande*. They were all allowed to sound the *ring* for about half an hour and addressed their chants and invocations to the divinities and assistant spirits.

The strongest of the three young *pande* appeared to be a young man called Jaman who was about twenty years old and was one of Hare and Krishora's nephews. The three novices sat in a straight line: Jaman was in the centre, Krishora opposite him and Hare behind. As soon as the young man had taken up his uncle and aunt's *ring* and had put on the ritual necklaces, he began to shake violently and chant brokenly and incomprehensibly in a state of sudden and profound trance.

The function of the expert *pande* is complex: they must test the knowledge of the *cela*, guide them and protect them from eventual attacks from malefic spirits, at the same time protecting them from committing any errors which would put the life of the community in danger. Given their inexperience and the fact that they may not yet be able to control their states of trance, it is quite possible for the *cela* to commit errors. This possibility is contained by the presence of the expert *pande* who themselves admit that they ask those divinities chosen by them to take possession of the young *pande* so as to test how much knowledge they have acquired and gauge their powers of resistance. Jaman went into a much deeper and more dramatic trance than is usual and at a later point in time his aunt told me she had convinced a local divinity, whose name was not revealed to me, to take possession of her nephew. According to Krishora, though this divinity is usually innocuous, it can sometimes take violent possession of *pande* and for one who cannot dominate it there is a risk that he enter into a state of temporary madness. During Jaman's state of trance, his aunt and uncle often had to help him, urging him to continue chanting and at times chanting with him and controlling his trance so that it did not overpower him. In the end the young man and the other two *cela* were all recognised and accepted as *pande*

by the whole community which had followed the performances of the young men with a certain apprehension. At times this apprehension would be transformed into collective hilarity when Hare made amusing comments at the most dramatic points in the possession which had taken hold of the novices, advising them to caress the skin of the *ring* as if it were the skin of a beautiful woman, a comment which caused much laughter.

All seances have moments of hilarity and drama though in the course of Chhonam these occur more suddenly and unexpectedly, both because the public is more disposed to this and much larger than normal, and because there is a joyous atmosphere to the festivities which preludes a season of abundance following a period of forced fasting due to the scarce availability of agricultural products in the months previous to this.

The consecration of the *cela* was followed by chants of thanks and dances carried out by both *pande* who moved out to the veranda of the habitation, all the while sounding their drums. They then moved back inside and had a pause during which the first requests for divinations about the future were heard. Everyone told their own stories and the story of an old Newar woman was followed with particular attention by those present. She told of how her son had fled from the village a few months previously and had abandoned his children and wife who had been ill ever since and was now lying, greatly weakened and with a high temperature, in her bed. Though the *pande* had not yet begun the divinations, he said that in his opinion the young man had probably fallen in love with another woman and this had caused him to flee the village. Again many wise comments and gossip was made about similar cases, and this, together with the consumption of more *raksi*, improved the humour of the public even further.

The phase dedicated to divinations began about half past one in the morning. The first divination was short: a Chepang woman asked the *pande* to investigate the cause of an illness which all her children appeared to have been affected by. After he had thrown some grains of rice on to the *ring* which was held in a horizontal position, Hare told the woman that one of her children was to die soon while the others would recover; this all lasted a few minutes only and took place without there being any chants. Other divinations followed which were fortunately less dramatic and then it was time to hear the Newar woman whose son had fled the village. All those present and the *pande* began to comment on and laugh about the matter until all of a sudden Hare's face darkened; he had been concluding the divination and he took the drum into his hand and placed the grains of rice which had been used for the divination on the ground and, in a state of trance, his voice almost broken by tears, began to chant:

*'Are the souls of the pande and divinities here or not ?  
Gaurinacha<sup>292</sup>!  
Gaurinacha, please go to the house of the gods !  
Transform yourself into a soul and go there !  
We only live once. For how long ?  
And then we die.  
There is pain in the house of the father.  
What bad things are happening to them ?  
Please, find out !  
I feel so sad, but they have no hope of living.  
Look, look Guathani.  
There may be some little hope that this man may still have some life left to him.*

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<sup>292</sup> This is the name of a supernatural divinity who works with the soul of the drum.

*Look, look.'*

Krishora did not utter a single word as she had already understood that the premonition concerned two of her brothers, as her husband confirmed when he came out of the trance. During the divination held for the Newar woman, though the *pande* had not asked for anything for themselves, some of the divinities of the Underworld had suddenly decided to reveal the dramatic destiny which was to befall Krishora's two brothers. She decided to try to make an offering to the supernatural beings right away in an attempt to convince them to change their minds. After the *pande* had begun to sound the *ring*, she tried several times to give offerings of rice to other divinities, symbolically throwing rice to the four cardinal points and then burst into tears as it would appear that those divinities she had turned to for help considered her to be impure and therefore refused to accept the rice from her hands, as one of her brothers had died not long beforehand. Crying, the woman began to chant:

*'(To the divinities) I beg of you, do not be angry.  
I am impure, do not be angry.  
In the house of the father there is something which is impure.  
What can I do ?  
It has happened....  
What should I do ?  
Please, do not speak against me.'*

However, the *pande* did not manage to present the offerings, nor change the destiny of the remaining two brothers of hers who were still alive<sup>293</sup>.

After Krishora had come out of her trance there was a pause of about an hour during which everyone talked about what had happened and tried to comfort Krishora who managed to overcome her pain and started chatting to her husband and the public. Hare did not want to carry out any more divinations and said that as he was usually correct in his predictions it was better not to look too carefully into the future.

Many of those attending the seance had fallen asleep as it was then half past three in the morning, others were chatting amongst themselves and the young people outside were still singing and dancing. It was now time to move into the final phase of the *puja*, the therapeutic phase which was to last for over five hours as there were many patients who hoped to find a cure for conditions which had been caused by supernatural beings. Many patients were treated and many of the cases differed greatly, some of which will be dealt with here.

The *pande* officiating at the Chhonam Festival usually know most of the patients who come for cures during Chhonam and diagnostic *puja* have usually already been held for them during which the supernatural nature of their condition has already been established. These are often the more serious cases for which the *pande* believe that little can be done during normal *puja* and they are therefore postponed until the Chhonam.

The first patient, a Chepang, had been struck some time ago by a magic arrow which had been sent by a witch and this had brought on bouts of temporary folly and problems with his eyesight. Hare looked long into the *ring* and tried to make out the face of the person responsible for his condition though he was not successful. The first chants then began:

*'I am not sure whether you should live or die.'*

<sup>293</sup> Not long after the *puja*, one of Krishora's brothers died. The other brother is still alive.

*Take the illness from his body.....*  
*I am removing the illness.*  
*You do not know how this happened.*  
*There is not much life left.*  
*I want to take the arrow out of your body.*  
*I am offering something.*  
 (To the divinities) *I will give you another life in return for his.*  
 (To the patient) *I will not let you die.*  
 (At this point Hare began to dance to the sound of the *ring* which was sounded by Krishora who carried on her husband's chant)  
*I am sending another arrow*  
*to counteract the one which struck you.*  
*Witch, you walk in the night.*  
*I control you by doing what is right.*  
*I am sending the arrow back.*  
*The witch is in your body;*  
*I am sending her back to where she belongs.*  
*The witch is walking in the night !*  
 (To the witch) *I control you !*  
*I am firing an arrow at you,*  
*o witch who walks the night.*  
*I have tried, I have tried....*  
*but you are still annoying me.*  
*This man is on the verge of death because of your arrows.*  
*I will make you suffer more.*  
*O you, who knows neither night nor day,*  
*I shall treat you in the right way.*  
 (After a few minutes pause, Hare took up the drum again and began to chant)  
 (To the witch) *You cannot lie: leave his body !*  
*At night you wander the fields and fly in the sky: leave him !*  
 (Hare passes the membrane of the *ring* over the body of the patient several times)  
*Pull it out !*  
*Pull it out !*  
*Pull out the illness !*  
*I am worried, this man might die !*  
 (To the patient) *Why are your bones and spirit divided into two ?*  
*Why ?*  
*You must not walk around the village, stay at home.*  
 (To the gods) *Please do not throw this man out of this world. '*

There was another pause during which a chicken and a cockerel were brought in by the patient's relatives who had decided to present these as an offering to the divinities in the hope that they would then agree to leave the body of their relative. Actually, even when a therapeutic *puja* is centred round the world of humans, or when it has been established that the condition has been caused by a witch or wizard who has been identified in a specific man or woman, the *pande* still have to interact with the supernatural. He must turn to them for help to counteract the illness so that both they, and the terrible lord of death, Yama, will give up the soul and content themselves with the blood of the sacrificial animal.

As already seen in previous chapters, both the human and divine must interact in order for a cure to be brought about and this then affects the social aspect.

The *pande* continued the *puja*: Hare danced, holding the two animals, and once he had sat down again he took the *ring* from his wife and chanted the following to the chicken and the cockerel:

*'You chickens will die in the place of this person.*  
*We will not let him die, we will find another way.*

*Whoever you are, witch, leave these things.*

*(To the animals) You must take the black magic away.*

*(To the gods) Come, eat and go away !*

*Tell me how I can help save this man's life.*

*Give him back his soul !*

*Do not kill this man.*

(Hare went out of the habitation to sacrifice the chicken and cockerel on a small altar which had been specially prepared by the *pande* before the *puja* and was for all those supernatural beings considered to be particularly dangerous and therefore not welcome inside the habitation. Krishora continued to chant and sound the *ring*.)

*( To the divinities) Take this witch away: the sacrifice is ready !*

*A chicken will be presented to the East and a cockerel to the West.*

*Do not worry, I am about to give you food.*

*You will not be able to disturb him any more.*

*Look at this chicken and go away !*

*I told you to go away !*

*I told you to go away !*

*Go away to the East.'*

According to the *pande* the cure was successful and they promised the man and his relatives that he would soon be cured. Many similar cases followed, after which there was a case which dealt with a woman who had a bad wound in one of her calves which would not heal and which was causing a burning sensation. The *pande* Krishora had to carry out a divination during which she saw that the cause of the probable infection was not of supernatural nature. She then told the woman she was not able to do anything for her and advised her to go into the forest in search of certain herbs which would help accelerate the healing process and counteract the infection.

The last case was the most complicated: it concerned a Tamang child who was about eight years old which the *pande* had already tried to cure a few months previously, but the case was so serious that the *pande* had decided that perhaps the only time they would have been able to find a cure was during Chhonam. The young boy had been having repeated sudden and violent fevers and terrible headaches and stomachaches. Krishora explained to those present that the soul of the child had been kidnapped by a Niu, one of the planets sent by Yama, the lord of death and that it was soon to move on into the hands of Kal, the other dangerous planet which the *pande* would not be able to do anything about.

The father of the child had stretched his finances to the extreme and decided to bring a goat and chicken for sacrifice in the hope of thus regaining the soul of his child. The sun was already high in the sky when the *pande* began to trace the outline of a vaguely anthropomorphic figure with coloured powders and this figure was supposed to represent the Niu which had to be overcome.

Chhonam is the only occasion when the drum can be sounded when the sun is high in the sky and the *pande* can thus continue to go into states of trance which can sometimes last until the early hours of the afternoon. All this is seen by the *pande* themselves as being a sort of extension of the nocturnal time conceded to them by the divinities on this particular day of the year which, amongst other things, means the divinities receive as many offerings as possible.

Once she had finished the design, Krishora entered into a trance and journeyed to the skies to deal directly with Yama and try to recuperate the soul of the child.

*'(To Yama) Yama, prepare yourself and prepare the skies.*

*(To the soul of the drum) I am pulling you ! Let's go ! Let's go !*

*Look up ! Look up !*  
*Move faster !*  
 (To Yama) *You cannot season the meat of humans.*  
*Come on Yama, come here !*  
 (To the drum) *Look....Look carefully !*  
 (To Yama) *Send the Niu away from there !*  
*You cannot take possession of the soul of a person.*  
*Why are you laughing ?*  
*Give him another one hundred and twelve years of life !*  
 (To the Niu) *Niu, you cannot come with us:*  
*Leave the child !!*  
 (At this point a thread was tied to the wrist of the child and the other end was placed on the design,  
 thus creating a link between the child and the cause of his condition)  
 (To Yama) *This thread will be a metal chain for you !*  
*You cannot take the child.*  
*Do not disturb the child, do not disturb the child.*  
*Give him back his life !*  
*You cannot kill without reason !*  
*Your threats cannot be directed at the child !*  
*You cannot walk with the child on this altar.*  
*Give me back my knowledge !*  
*Give me back my knowledge !*  
*You cannot set limits to the age of the child.*  
 (To Kal) *Kal, you cannot come into the world of humans !'*

There then followed a pause during which the goat was brought in and water was poured onto its head. As soon as the animal moved its head, everyone relaxed: the goat had thus agreed to be sacrificed: his life was to be exchanged for that of the child.

Hare, his nephew Jaman and the father of the child took the animal out of the habitation and went to the banks of the nearby river where they decapitated the goat whose blood was allowed to flow freely onto some stones. They then returned with the carcass which was immediately thrown onto a fire which had been specially prepared in a nearby field without the animal having been gutted beforehand.

Hare returned to the house and concluded the cure by dancing on the design, rapidly deleting it with the movement of his feet while Krishora sounded the *ring* and addressed the final chants to Yama:

'(To Yama) *You are powerful.*  
*I am guiding you with my hands !*  
*I am giving you one life in exchange for another.*  
*Eat your sacrifice to save the life of another.*  
*Go to the river and look for your food.*  
*You cannot play.*  
*You cannot cause any more pain.*  
*Who drinks the blood ?*  
*Come and sit here with me.*  
*I give you one life in the place of another.*  
*I give you blood in the place of other blood.*  
*Do not come back !*  
*Do not play with invisible arrows.*  
*Drinkers of blood,*  
*witches, witches of the forest,*  
*bir, bir of the forest.*

*Do not allow the one hundred bayu of Tenzin Sherpa to come,<sup>294</sup>  
 Let us go to a monastery.  
 Do not disturb the child,  
 do not tire him out.  
 Let us go to dance.'*

This final therapy was also successful and the *pande* told the father of the child that he would soon recover as Yama had consented for the moment to release the child's soul.

After another pause, the *pande* again presented the offerings of *ghaiya* and fruits to the divinities of the *patal*, those of the *akas* and to the ancestors and at about eleven o'clock in the morning the long *puja* was over. The altar remained as it was for five days inside the habitation so that the supernatural beings could continue to enjoy the offerings and the *pande* then held a brief nocturnal ceremony during which all the divinities who had been convened there were thanked and invited to return to their own worlds.

The Chhonam, which I have briefly described here, brief moments of which have been separately described and examined in earlier chapters, encompasses all the main aspects of Chepang Shamanism. This is in fact the only occasion on which the *pande* has to perform most of his or her functions, amongst which the function of diviner, therapist, guide for younger shamans and intermediary between the world of the divinities and that of humans and between that of humans and that of the ancestors.

In the two months which follow, the *pande* usually refuse to hold *puja* though exceptions to this rule can be made in the event of particularly serious cases.

The characteristic harvest offering made during Chhonam which comes from the cultivations and harvests which have just taken place, have probably superimposed on an earlier festivity which was based on the cult of the ancestors and the homages made to the *pande* by the commoners. In fact, some of the older Chepang remember that when the Chepang were hunters Chhonam used to be celebrated in order to pay homage to the ancestors who were presented not with offerings which had been taken from cultivations which were still unknown to the Chepang, but with offerings taken from the jungle. Plates of offerings of wild fruit, especially a type of lemon which can be found in the forest are still presented today, and these fruit usually become mature at the same time as the Chhonam.

Likewise, the *ring* used by those who live in the district of Chitwan in particular are adorned with flowers and leafy branches in season which must be gathered from the jungle by the *pande* themselves and this is a form of homage to the soul of the drum.

One ceremony which has remained almost the same is the Namrung *puja* which is held to pay homage to the god of hunting, Namrung.

This festival is held during the day as it involves a hunt although this activity has now been banned by the authorities which have banned hunting in many areas of the country. As it is held during the day, the *ring* is not used and the *pande* therefore do not go into a state of trance.

Although I was aware that the Namrung *puja* was actually held secretly, it was quite difficult to be able to attend one of these ceremonies as, for about five years, most *pande* refused to talk to me about the ceremony. In April 1995, I finally managed to

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<sup>294</sup> After Tenzin Sherpa, Sir Edmund Hillary's guide on his climb of Everest, had died, he was encompassed into Chepang mythology as a god of the high mountains. Like most divinities, he is followed by dangerous demons whose thirst for blood means that they come to places where sacrifices are being made and the *pande* therefore have to make sure they stay away.

obtain permission to attend a ceremony. Not only was I invited to attend the ceremony, but I was also asked to request special permission from the authorities to allow the Chepang to hunt for one day, as they were sure that this request would not be refused to a foreigner. However, as I was aware of the fact that the Chepang were not held in much account by the authorities who usually belong to superior castes and as I believed that this could have caused some trouble after my departure, I asked the people of the village, where the *pande* Narcing who had granted me permission to attend the Namrung *puja* lived, to meditate on what they had asked me to do. After they had discussed the matter for a day, the men eventually decided that it would be better to hold the Namrung in secret as they had always done as they were sure that as soon as I left they would be subject to checks and accusations which may have led to some of them going to prison.

Given the fact that it is extremely rare that anyone else be allowed to attend the Namrung, I shall attempt to describe the ceremony in detail though this has also been described in the previously mentioned work by Nivak K. Rai<sup>295</sup>. The Namrung *puja* the Nepalese scholar attended was held about twenty years ago at a time when many Chepang still hunted with bows and arrows and therefore the description, though somewhat schematic, is unique.

We left the village at dawn, together with the men and children and were guided by the *pande* to a place in the heart of the jungle which he considered to be propitious for the ceremony. After about two hours, Narcing decided to stop as he had found a place which was well enough protected by the vegetation to dress the altar which took about an hour to prepare. Narcing ordered a boy to cut nine *katuj* (T68b: *Castanopsis Histrix*) branches. This plant is sacred for the god of hunting and the branches were placed in a straight line in front of him, two of which were moved slightly to one side. He placed five stones in front of the first seven branches and another two smaller stones opposite the other branches on which two symbolic bows made of bamboo were placed with six arrows made of the same material.

The stones symbolise the different types of Namrung. The five stones represent the Gorkha Namrung Shikari brothers who accept offerings of the blood of animals and the other two represent the Namrung Pachabaiya Shikari gods who only accept offerings of milk or a substitute mixture of flour and water. After having placed small offerings of food opposite the altar, Narcing took almost all his clothes off, leaving only his loincloth, and sounded a bronze bell, after which he began the invocations and chants addressed alternatively to the five and two stones.

*' O gods who have played in the skies,  
from the time in which men told the truth,  
this puja has been held in the name of Namrung:  
yesterday the ancestors played with nine bows and arrows...  
You are the one who plays with nine bows and arrows.  
The golden jhakri play at Chitwan, the ban-jhakri...  
Oh guru, let us play in the truth, let us walk in the truth.  
Reassure us and pardon us,  
this has happened since the time of the ancestors.  
Everything has happened since the time of the ancestors.  
O you who play in the skies,<sup>296</sup>  
Gorkha Namrung Shikari.....*

<sup>295</sup> Rai, K. N. 1985, op.cit., pp.101 - 102.

<sup>296</sup> As we have already said, Namrung lives in the world of humans but from time to time he journeys to the skies or Heavens or Underworld to take game to the divinities.

*Oh god, you are Namrung Pachabaiya.  
 Sounding the golden bell,  
 you, who play on the high mountains,  
 who guides the horses with their carts from the four corners of the quadrangle of mountains.  
 Eight brothers, twelve brothers, one hundred brothers,  
 you took the moves from the one hundred and seventy eight promises....  
 one hundred hunters have played here since the time of the ancestors.  
 One plays in the black jungle and in the white jungle and in Chitwan.....  
 you are the golden jhakri, the ban-jhakri, the jhakri with the knowledge<sup>297</sup>.  
 You are the one who lives in the jungle.  
 I am the person who is devoted to you, I am at your service.  
 Give us a large or small animal.  
 While you sound your golden bell, you walk and play.  
 The animals can cross the seven hills and seven rivers,  
 keep them in this area.  
 O god, you will come, playing with the chariots of the Heavens.  
 O god, you are the one who lives in the world of the wild.  
 The ban-boksi and the ban-bir may accompany you:  
 keep them away from the humans !  
 Look at the seven hills and walk around the seven rivers....  
 O god, this ceremony is being held for Gorkha Namrung Shikari,  
 it is being held in the house of the gods:  
 we are playing across all the Heavens,  
 we are playing in all the jungles which surround us and in the forests.  
 Let us hunt, look upon us kindly,  
 Gorkha Namrung Shikari.  
 Witches may come to watch.  
 From the time of our forefathers we have always made offerings  
 and today in this jungle, under the hundred katuj plants, all our offerings are being made for you.  
 Seven sisters who are hunters<sup>298</sup>, eight brothers who are hunters, twelve brothers who are hunters, one  
 hundred hunters who are brothers,  
 This is not a puja for other gods:  
 a puja will be held for them at the next full moon,  
 when the offerings will be presented.  
 Till that moment, keep them away from here.  
 Ban-bir, ban-boksi....can follow you to the altar in search of food:  
 control them ! !'*

Narcing asked the men to whistle and shout as loud as they could so as to attract the attention of Namrung, and, while this noise was going on he told one of his young assistants to bring the domestic cockerel which had been brought into the jungle with them together with the other offerings. After he had decapitated the animal, Narcing covered the two stones to one side with leaves as the Namrung Pachabaiya they represented could not stand the sight of blood and poured the blood onto the five stones as a sign of offering to the Gorkha Namrung. The liver was taken out of the cockerel after it had been eviscerated and the former was carefully observed by the *pande* who then had it slightly roasted on the fire and then torn into little pieces and placed in front of the stones<sup>299</sup>.

<sup>297</sup> As several *pande* have said, Namrung is not a real *jhakri* but as he lives in the jungle he meets the real *ban-jhakri* and this is the only reason why he is called this.

<sup>298</sup> The *pande* believe that there are female counterparts to Namrung who are their sisters though they do not, however, have anything to do with the world of humans and only short invocations are addressed to them.

<sup>299</sup> N. K. Rai. 1985, op.cit., p.101. also describes a hepatoscopic divination. In both cases, the *pande* interprets the blemishes or veins. If there are many of these this means that the hunt will be successful.

Narcing took up the chant again, this time without the bell and entered into a controlled state of trance:

*'This is Gorkha Namrung's puja,  
now we are ready to hunt in this golden forest.  
The witches of the wood may gather round to eat:  
Send them away !!  
We hunt throughout the jungle; through the stones; through the leaves,  
give us great power, Gorkha Namrung !  
Give us the power of the four corners and the quadrangle of mountains.  
Other spirits, bir, bayu, could harm these people,  
please, protect them from those too.  
You are the one who has always been respected from the time of the ancestors.  
Old man of the wood, old woman of the wood,  
give us the strength....  
Accept all our offerings with pleasure.  
The dogs and hunters may encounter difficulties:  
they may fall into ravines, they might be hurt !!  
Protect them !!  
Take the spirits and witches of the wood into a place,  
likewise the wind bayu, the winged bayu,  
the waking bayu, the giant bayu,  
the one hundred bayu...  
God, we are ready....  
let us go and hunt !  
When I fight my enemies, you, Namrung, must give me strength.  
When I play against the enemies, you must come opposite me.  
O god, you come down,  
on the chariot of the sun and the moon.  
You are the one who plays in the oceans;  
you hunt in the waters;  
you are the one who plays in the skies;  
you are the hunter of the moon;  
you are the one who can manipulate the sixty-four mashan and the giant mashan.  
You have the fifty-two bir in your hands.  
Do not create difficulties for the humans,  
by causing their body or eyes to feel pain.  
We have respected you since the time of the ancestors.  
Every year I will hold a puja for you.  
The animals and young children may have problems,  
protect my village.'*

After he had finished the chant, Narcing authorised the men to leave for the hunt and excused himself for not taking part as he was too old.

The hunt, as we have already said, only takes place with catapults and stones: the men form a group and once they have found their prey, they encircle it, run alongside it and then attack it with the catapults.

During the beatings which went on for a few hours, Narcing continued to remain seated near the altar apart from one moment when he got up and asked his young assistant to take the small bows and arrows and fire them in all the different directions.

The *puja* cannot end until at least one wild animal is killed which happened around three hours after the chants had finished when, after an exhausting chase, the men managed to kill a wild cockerel<sup>300</sup> which they immediately brought to the *pande* who

<sup>300</sup> In Nepali the fowl was called '*kali*' (T90b) which translates as pheasant. The bird actually caught was a wild fowl.

repeated the procedure he had followed previously with the domestic fowl he had previously sacrificed. Namrung is given the blood, head and liver of the sacrificial animals and the meat is shared out amongst the hunters in equal parts.

After the Namrung *puja*, the men may continue to hunt for the rest of the day, but before they do so a banquet is held in the jungle when the domestic fowl used for the sacrifice during the ceremony and the wild fowl caught during the hunt are prepared and eaten by all.

The main objective of the Namrung *puja* and Chhonam is to present offerings, some in the form of sacrifices, to the divinities and ancestors, though only during Chhonam do the *pande* journey to the ancestors to take them the offerings made by those of their relatives still alive. The relationship with the world beyond the grave is also re-established during the ceremony held in honour of the god of hunting. In fact it is obvious from the chants that the Namrung *puja* has always been celebrated since the time of the ancestors who also venerated and respected this great god. Namrung is considered, more so than the other divinities, to be a god strongly linked to the time of the forefathers, a semi-mythical period when the group lived and hunted freely in the jungles and forests when they are believed to have eaten meat almost every day according to the Chepang.

The harvest offerings made during Chhonam and the offerings of the blood, head and liver of the game killed during the hunt held in honour of Namrung have similar functions. In both cases order must be re-established, order which has been jeopardised by humans themselves who have taken what belongs to the world of the divinities: whether the plants are *ghaiya* or other types like the *sandan*, their roots still penetrate into the Underworld where they have their origins. The wild animals in the forests and jungles were created by the divinities for their exclusive consumption, thanks to the successive creation of the 'divine hunter', Namrung himself who controls all fauna. Humans therefore make use of these products undeservedly and create a rupture between the world of humans and that of the supernatural beings who, as they are very sensitive, could decide to destroy all those who have sullied their hands with such sacrilege. The *pande* restores equilibrium by means of sacrifices and offerings and it is for this reason that neither the harvest offerings presented at Chhonam nor the meat of the game captured during the hunt can be eaten before the *pande* makes some offering to the divinities which is also a form of request for pardon.

It is somewhat paradoxical that the offerings made during these two important annual ceremonies do not aim to bring together the world of humans and the world of the supernatural. For a peaceful equilibrium to exist, these two worlds must, at least in these cases, be different and distinct from one another. The 'theft' carried out by the hunters in the jungle when they kill the game and the undeserved appropriation of the rice, other agricultural products and wild fruits could anger of superior beings and therefore bring them closer to the world and villages of humans so they could take revenge for the outrage the humans had committed. Only the *pande* has the means and instruments, gifts from the divinities themselves, to ensure this does not come about.

The *pande* has two functions; that of 'wizard of the hunt' and that of guide who also ensures that everything takes place in the correct fashion, just as it was in the time of those ancestors who are now living happily and peacefully near the divinities. For the same reason, no-one except the *pande* may touch the offerings presented to the divinities; if the offerings were to be contaminated by human contact which would mean contact took place between the two different worlds, they would not be

accepted by the supernatural beings who will not accept any intervention except that of the *pande*.

## Conclusion

The complexities of the Chhonam and Namrung *puja* appear to express most aspects of Chepang Shamanism and many of the characteristics and history of their people.

The Namrung *puja* is linked to the time of the ancestors and original features of this group, most importantly that of hunting activities. The Chhonam appears to be a celebration of their principle resources, namely agriculture and to a more limited extent, the rearing of animals.

As I have often said, I believe it is wrong to consider Shamanism as a limited, archaic and fossilised group of beliefs.

Unlike other religions where the personal component is not so highly developed, Shamanism is open to different suggestions and modifications and is more than capable of interpreting the changes which ethnic groups are subject to.

As this religion has not been codified in written form nor does it have a hierarchical system, it has the advantage of being able to enrich itself with the inclusion of new elements and may even transform others in order to make the tensions which come with marked changes more easily understood and sustainable for the individuals in question.

This can be seen in the Namrung *puja* with the introduction of two new elements: the sacrifice of the domestic animal which preceded the sacrifice of the wild fowl and the offerings of milk in the place of blood to the Namrung Pachabaiya Shikari brothers. The offerings of milk are typical of many sheep farming populations and, together with the fowl, symbolise the rearing of domestic animals which rules out the possibility of a nomadic life in the jungle.

In the Namrung *puja* the world of wild animals coexists alongside that of domestic animals and the Chhonam sees the passage from wild jungle fruits to agricultural products. The *ring*, which is first and foremost a hunter, is adorned with branches from the forest and the plates of offerings also contain certain wild fruits which mature in the month in which Chhonam is held. On the other hand, these festivities are mainly linked to the first rice harvest and in general to the harvests of other agricultural products.

These festivities would appear to be slowly adapting to the evolution of the Chepang themselves. The *pande* has the most important role in almost all functions and restores equilibrium in situations which are dramatic both for individuals and the community as a whole.

The events in Chepang mythology are continuously re-enacted thus founding a plausible and acceptable vision of the world which is indispensable for all the components of the ethnic group. The faith remains the same and is shared by all though it is not closed in on itself and the *pande* appear to bring renewed motivation and vigour to every *puja* they celebrate.

All crises situations, be they individual or collective, bring about a change in conditions. This change may involve the community as a whole, as was the case when they changed from a system of hunting and gathering to an agricultural system. Initially, it may even involve single individuals when, for example, someone falls ill because he or she has been struck by a supernatural being and his or her soul has been kidnapped thus causing great changes in the individual.

In order to prevent the change in condition from becoming a crisis for which there is no solution, the *pande* must first of all find good explanations for the change and then he must find solutions against a background of a common faith which appear

concrete and plausible and capable of restoring order to the three spheres: that of the individual, the social sphere and that of the supernatural.

In fact the figure of Namrung is causing serious problems in this sense. Up to a few decades ago this god was probably the most venerated of all given that all ceremonies held before and after hunts had to be dedicated to him. But, as hunting activities have been banned, the *pande* feel they have betrayed this god and fear that one day he may decide to take revenge because of the reduced number of ceremonies and offerings dedicated to him.

For this reason the *pande* have again had to find a solution and, for the moment, this is the Namrung *puja* which must be held at least once a year and on this occasion all Chepang must return to hunt.

It will be interesting to observe what happens to this god in the years to come, particularly in the case of the future generations of *pande* who are far removed from the world of the forests and jungles. These, however, are still a remarkable resource of food given the gathering of wild fruit, mushrooms and roots which takes place though hunting and the techniques and ceremonies linked to it will soon be alien to this culture.

Given the relative integrity and richness of Chepang Shamanism, it should be the subject of further study which I hope this work will open the way for. Apart from the remarkable interest of the ethnic group itself, the entire Chepang culture can without doubt be of great help in attaining a better understanding of the cultures of other Nepali ethnic groups even though these may have been more influenced by other religions such as Buddhism and, mainly, Hinduism.

The approximately fifty different ethnic groups which exist in Nepal are not closed and impermeable units and contact with the inevitable exchanges and influences which follows creates similar and parallel cultural forms which are extremely interesting.

Despite those undeniable and necessary integrations which have taken place in the cultures and religions of many groups in Nepal, changes and influences have been passed down in oral form from one generation to another for centuries. In contrast to what happened in Siberia and Mongolia because of well-known historical events, Shamanism has never been persecuted or condemned in Nepal and this has allowed traditions to be maintained. This in turn has allowed an integrity which is precious to those in general involved in the field, though at different levels and with different intentions, of the history of religions or religious anthropology both in Asia and many other parts of the world in that Shamanism is still present, albeit often in varying degrees.

As Nepal has never really been colonised, there is no feeling of hostility or resentment of western researchers and the natural sense of hospitality of the Nepalese greatly facilitates research. I have always been received with great kindness by the Chepang and most *pande* have accepted to talk freely to me. I have often been received with great respect by all the inhabitants of the villages and most of all by the shamans once they realised my determination to bear witness to and make known the Chepang culture and religion.

Many *pande* consider me to be a form of disciple or *cela*, and their precious and patient teachings have been indispensable to this work. They have also given me an insight into a field which may initially appear to be arduous and difficult to penetrate but which, in fact, would actually appear to be a perfectly balanced system to be approached with the indispensable tools of ethnology, great respect and humanity thanks to which everything becomes more simple.

When I asked the *pande* Tulo Kancha the question he replied,

## Nepali Calendar

The Nepali calendar is based on that of the Indian solar calendar. The year is composed of 365 days, begins with the month of Baisakh on the fifteenth of April and is divided into twelve months which have a minimum of twenty-nine and a maximum of thirty-one days each.

Baisakh	15 April - 15 May
Jeth	15 May - 15 June
Asar	15 June - 15 July
Saun	15 July - 15 August
Bhado	15 August - 15 September
Asoj	15 September - 15 October
Kartik	15 October - 15 November
Mansir	15 November - 15 December
Pus	15 December - 15 January
Magh	15 January - 15 February
Fagun	15 February - 15 March
Cait	15 March - 15 April

## Glossary

### Key :

a = Arunta

c = Chepang

d = Dhimal

g = Gurung

k = Ket

l = Limbu

m = Meche

na. = Na-khi

n. = Nepali

p.k. = Papua Kiwai

s = Sanscrit

sh. = Sherpa

T = Tibetan

t = Tamang

y = Yakuti

Note : Many of the terms classed as n (Nepali) are also used in Hindi.

<i>Acheta</i> (n)	Rice used for offerings in many religious ceremonies.
<i>Agati (or pisac)</i> (n)	Souls of those who have died accidental or violent deaths or souls of children who have died young and come back to cause harm to their families.
<i>Akas</i> (n)	Heaven
<i>Ama</i> (n)	Mother
<i>An</i> (k)	The seven souls which according to the Siberian Ket reside in the body of all men.
<i>Ayurvedic</i> (s)	Ancient Hindu system of medicine.
<i>Bang</i> (c)	Stone.
<i>Ban</i> (n)	Forest, jungle.
<i>Ban-boksini</i> (n)	Another name for the <i>ban-jhakrini</i> .
<i>Ban-jhakri</i> (n)	Spirit-shaman resident in the forests.
<i>Ban-jhakrini</i> (n)	Dangerous witch, wife of the <i>ban-jhakri</i> .
<i>Bahun</i> (n)	Brahmin.
<i>Bayu (or Vayu)</i> (n)	Demons who usually come in the form of winds.
<i>Belam Bharu</i> (c)	Witch.
<i>Bhut-Pret</i> (n)	Demons.
<i>Bir</i> (n)	Demons.
<i>Bis</i> (y)	There are both high <i>bis</i> and low <i>bis</i> . These are divinities and spirits of the Yakut pantheon.
<i>Biyal</i> (c)	Children born of relationships between Chepang men and women of other ethnic groups.
<i>Boksi</i> (n)	Witch.
<i>Bombo</i> (t)	Tamang shaman.
<i>Bunsi</i> (c)	Chepang term for the <i>sandan</i> tree.
<i>Cela</i> (n)	Disciple, apprentice.
<i>Chetri</i> (n)	Someone belonging to the caste of warriors.
<i>Chewar</i> (n)	The first hair-cutting ceremony for a child.
<i>Chhonam</i> (c)	Important annual festivity when harvest offerings are made

	to the divinities and ancestors.
<i>Chyuri</i> (n)	<i>Bassia Butyracea</i> .
<i>Da lo ma</i> (sh)	‘Woman who has come back from the Underworld.’ This is used to describe women who are believed to have journeyed to the Underworld at some time when in a profound state of catalepsy.
<i>Dawan</i> (c)	During the periods of famine, this term is used to describe the one day of the week when food is eaten.
<i>Dharma</i> (s)	Religion and religious and moral duty.
<i>Gajo</i> (n)	Drum stick.
<i>Gamana</i> (s)	The four magic powers recognised by Buddhism in the <i>Buddhaghosa Visuddhimagga</i> .
<i>Ghaiya</i> (n)	Type of rice which grows on dry land.
<i>Graha</i> (n)	Planets.
<i>Gurau</i> (n)	Extremely powerful <i>jhakri</i> who are believed to be able to turn into animals.
<i>Guru</i> (n)	Guide, teacher, instructor.
<i>Ha</i> (na.)	Together with the <i>o</i> and the <i>hu</i> , these are the three main souls which the Na-khi, an ethnic group in Chinese Yunan, believe each one of us has.
<i>Hu</i> (na.)	Together with the <i>o</i> and the <i>hu</i> , these are the three main souls which each of us has according to the Na-khi.
<i>Iruntarinia</i> (ar)	Spirits responsible for the initiatory process of dismembering and recomposing novice shamans in the Arunta (Australia).
<i>Jar</i> (n)	Adultery.
<i>Jarai</i> (n)	Illegitimate children.
<i>Jari-kal</i> (n)	Sum of money paid by the second husband of a woman to her first husband.
<i>Jat</i> (n)	Clan.
<i>Jatayu</i> (n)	Vulture. Also used as a surname for the bird-god Garuda.
<i>Jhakri</i> (n)	Nepalese shaman.
<i>Jhankrism</i> (n)	Nepalese Shamanism.
<i>Kal</i> (n)	Time, death, destiny. The Chepang use this term to describe a dangerous <i>graha</i> which, when sent by Yama raja to the human world, will cause the person in question certain death.
<i>Kala mala</i> (n)	A necklace with spherical black beads which is used by <i>jhakri</i> .
<i>Kalij</i> (n)	Pheasant.
<i>Kamnu</i> (n)	Trembling. This term is usually used to describe the type of trembling or shaking seen in the shamanic trance.
<i>Katuj</i> (n)	<i>Castanopsis Histris</i> .
<i>Ketu</i> (n)	Comet. This is also the term given to the <i>graha</i> .
<i>Khoriya</i> (n)	Technique of cultivation called slash and burn.
<i>Kitchkanne</i> (n)	Spirit-witch who appears to humans in the form of a beautiful and sensual woman.
<i>Koiralu</i> (n)	<i>Bauhinia Variegata</i> , a tree whose wood is used by the Tamang to make shamanic drums.
<i>Kshatriya</i> (s)	Belonging to the caste of warriors.
<i>Kumar</i> (n)	Prince (s).
<i>Kush</i> (n)	Sacred grass.

<i>Lâ</i> (c)	Moon.
<i>Lente</i> (t)	The soul of a deceased shaman.
<i>Lota</i> (n)	Typical container used to take water from larger containers.
<i>Macha</i> (n)	Fish.
<i>Madal</i> (n)	Drum used by laymen on festive occasions.
<i>Mahadev</i> (n)	Great god. This is used throughout Nepal as another name for Shiva.
<i>Maina</i> (n) reincarnation	The bird which the Chepang believe to be the first of a deceased soul. ( <i>Gracula Religiosa</i> )
<i>Mala</i> (n)	Necklace.
<i>Mangba</i> (l)	Limbu ritual specialist who deals mainly with cases in which souls of those who have died in accidents or have died violently
<i>Mantra</i> (n)	Prayer, magic formula, chant.
<i>Markanu</i> (n)	Distorsion of a muscle or some articulation.
<i>Mashan</i> (n)	Demons.
<i>Muke</i> (l)	Limbu ecstatic functionary who has received a call from the spirits which has been particularly violent.
<i>Muni</i> (s)	The figure of an ecstatic as described in the <i>Rg Veda</i> .
<i>Muri</i> (n)	Measurement of weight. One <i>muri</i> is equivalent to around one hundred and sixty pounds.
<i>Naga</i> (n)	Male serpent divinity in the Underworld.
<i>Naghini</i> (n)	Female serpent divinity in the Underworld.
<i>Nari</i> (n)	Woman.
<i>Natha</i> (s)	A religious movement which was very popular in India in the twelfth century whose objective was to obtain occult powers through the practise of yoga.
<i>Nautara</i> (n)	Nine stars. These are believed by the Chepang to cause eye infections.
<i>Niu</i> (c)	Name of a planet which causes illnesses in humans.
<i>Nwagi</i> (n)	First rice harvest. This is also the name given to different festivities where harvest offerings are made.
<i>Nyem</i> (c)	The sun.
<i>O</i> (na.)	Together with the <i>ha</i> and <i>hu</i> , these are the three main souls which the Na-khi believe all humans to possess.
<i>Oboro</i> (p.k.)	The Papua Kiwai term to describe the spirits of the deceased.
<i>Ojha</i> (d)	Dhimal shaman.
<i>Pai</i> (g)	A Gurung Ceremony used to finally send off the soul of the deceased.
<i>Pala</i> (s)	Guardian.
<i>Panchayat</i> (n)	The system used to divide Nepal into different areas, each of which had its own political and juridical administration.
<i>Panda</i> (n)	Religious official who inherits his post and presides over a temple.
<i>Pande</i> (c)	Chepang shaman.
<i>Pasni</i> (n)	A ceremony held when a child eats its first solid foods.
<i>Pasnu</i> (n)	Enter, gain access to or accede.
<i>Patal</i> (n)	The Underworld.

<i>Pen bu</i> (sh)	Sherpa shaman.
<i>Phalaknu</i> (n)	A form of murmuring or incoherent crying. However, this is usually used to describe the typically convulsive and broken speech used by the <i>jhakri</i> when they are in a state of trance.
<i>Phamo</i> (t)	These are the guiding spirits of the Tamang <i>bombo</i> .
<i>Phendagma</i> (l)	Limbu shamans.
<i>Poughadin</i> (c)	The process which is used to make the <i>ring</i> which must not take more than five days.
<i>Praja</i> (n)	Subject. It is also the new name given to the Chepang.
<i>Puhun</i> (n)	Those belonging to the caste of Untouchables.
<i>Puja</i> (n)	A ceremony of any type in any religion.
<i>Raksas</i> (n)	Demons.
<i>Raksi</i> (n)	Typical Nepalese liquor, usually made from barley.
<i>Ri bombo</i> (sh)	<i>Ban-jhakri</i> in Sherpa.
<i>Ring</i> (or <i>rin</i> ) (c)	Single membrane Chepang shamanic drum.
<i>Rojha</i> (m)	Meche shaman.
<i>Rnga</i> (T)	Lamaistic Tibetan drum.
<i>Rud</i> (s)	Weeping.
<i>Rudraksha</i> (n)	<i>Elaeocarpus ganitrus</i> . The seeds of this plant are sacred for both Hindus and shamans.
<i>Sal</i> (n)	<i>Shorea Robusta</i> .
<i>Saman</i> (t)	Tungus shaman.
<i>Samba</i> (l)	Limbu ritual specialist who is an expert chanter of myths.
<i>Sandan</i> (n)	A tree the <i>pande</i> use for the wood of the <i>ring</i> .
<i>Shikari</i> (n)	Hunter (s).
<i>Shudra</i> (s)	Belonging to the caste of workers.
<i>Smyon pa</i> (sh.)	The term for madness in Sherpa.
<i>Sramana</i> (s)	Buddhist ascetic.
<i>Sramanera</i> (s)	Buddhist monk.
<i>Sunal Ama</i> (c)	Uterus.
<i>Thal</i> (n)	Metal plate which the <i>jhakri</i> sometimes beat instead of using the drum.
<i>Thapmura</i> (l)	Limbu ecstatic functionary who received a non-violent calling from the spirits.
<i>Thar</i> (n)	Clan.
<i>Topi</i> (n)	Typical type of headgear worn by Nepalese men.
<i>Tunsuriban</i> (c)	Term used to distinguish between <i>pande</i> and <i>jhakri</i> on the basis of whether they can journey to the Underworld as well as to the Heavens.
<i>Ul'vej</i> (k)	This term is used by the Siberian Ket to define a sort of shadow-soul which may have different destinies after the death of the individual it has belonged to.
<i>Urghsuriban</i> (c)	This term is used to define the <i>jhakri</i> who can only journey to the Heavens and not to the Underworld.
<i>Vaisya</i> (s)	Belonging to the class of merchants.
<i>Vrâtya</i> (s)	These may be ascetic followers of Shiva, perhaps a non-Aryan ancient people or groups of mystics described in the fifteenth book of the <i>Atharva Veda</i> .

*Yeba* (1)  
*Yema* (1)

Limbu ritual specialists.  
Female Limbu ritual specialists.

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