

THE WORLD OF THE GURUNGS



Sarah Harrison & Alan Macfarlane

The book and films Dedicated to:

Our Gurung family and friends

© Sarah Harrison and Alan Macfarlane 2018

Contents

Preface	7
---------	---

The Physical World of the Gurungs

The Setting	11
Types of resource in Thak	16
Paths roads and walks	25
Communications and power	33
Forest and animals	36
Wood and leaves	38
Animals	44

Crops and agriculture

The yearly cycle	54
Rice	55
Maize	64
Millet	69
Communal work parties	71
Vegetables and pulses	72

Crafts and technology

Household crafts	76
Household tasks	84
Craftsmen	86
Spinning and weaving and clothing	89
Building	92

Other activities

Shops, traders and salesmen	98
Water supplies and sanitation	101
Cleaning and washing	102
Health	105

The Social World of the Gurungs

Introduction: a few features of the village	111
The young and the old	116
Formal Education	125
Feasts, festivals and sports	131
Music – dancing, singing and the Tailor’s band	136
Society and ritual	142
Society and economy	143
Society and power	144

The virtual village in a wider world

Changing Pokhara	147
Gurung life in Pokhara	153
A Gurung family in Pokhara	158
Clan picnics – the Kebje clan in Pokhara	167
Gurung cultural identity	170
Elsewhere in Nepal:	180
A Gurung migrant worker to India	182
Gurungs in Hong Kong	186
Gurungs in the United Kingdom	190
Interviews	196

The Spiritual World of the Gurungs

Introduction	201
--------------	-----

Family and community rituals

Introduction	204
Dasain Festivals	209
Other rituals	210

Weddings and funerals

Weddings	223
Funerals and cremations	232

Six Gurung sacred dances

Ghatu	242
Kusun	255
Krishna Charitra	260
Rih teba	265
Chhyadu	266
Sherga	270

The pachhyu (shaman)

Introduction	273
Moshi Theba	275
Phi Ngai Sainba	281
Dhin bar lava	291
Phailu or ancestor ritual	293
Plahgu lava	297
Gra Tihba	300
Pachhyu work	301

The Jhankri

Ritual for toothache	305
For deafness	307

The Gurung Memorial Ritual or Pae

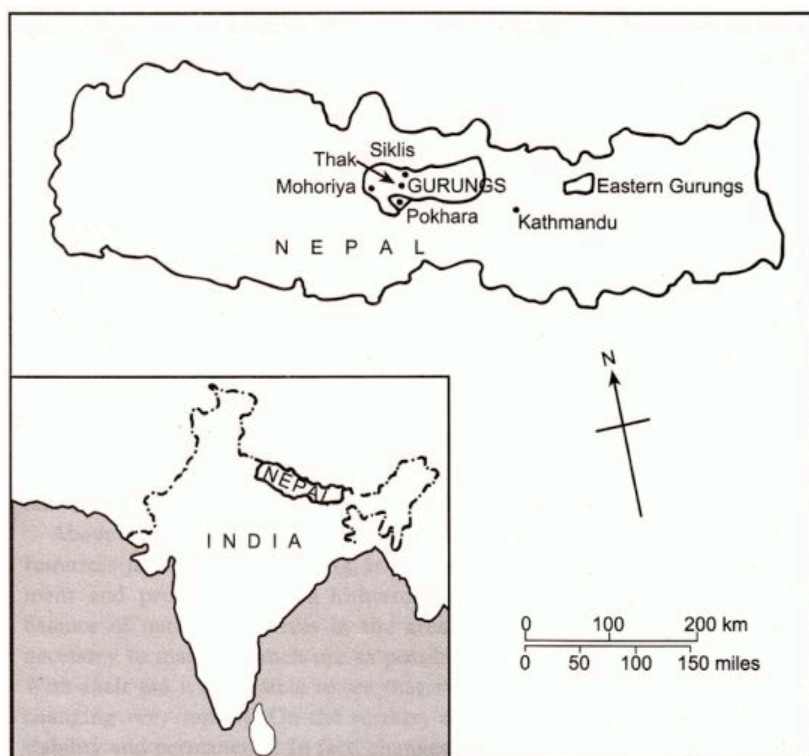
Introduction	308
Description of the ritual by Thak paccyhu	310
The 1995 ritual for Dilmaya	318
Early films of ritual – 1969-70	319
Appendix: Photos of Kusun dance	320

The Changing World of the Gurungs

Twenty years after first arriving	325
Thirty years after first arriving	333
Reflections after thirty-five years	349
Forty years of change in a Gurung village	353
Interview in 2014	356
Reflections on forty-five years of change in Thak	357
Fifty years after first arrival	359
Video films to accompany this book	365
Brief bibliography	367
Acknowledgements	367

Preface

The Gurungs (who call themselves in their own language ‘Tamu’) are an ethnic group of about six hundred and fifty thousand people (inside Nepal) who traditionally lived at an altitude of between four and seven thousand feet in central Nepal. They are well known as one of the ‘martial tribes’ who are recruited into the Gurkha regiments of the British and Indian armies. The location of the group in the twentieth century is shown on the map below, though now there are many Gurungs in other parts of the world.



Alan first arrived in the village of Thak to do his Ph.D. in anthropology in December 1968. At that time it took about five or six hours to walk from the small town of Pokhara in central Nepal to reach the five thousand foot high village on the slopes of the Annapurna Mountains. Alan returned to Thak in December for

another visit. From then until 2002, Alan and Sarah visited the village almost every year for between three weeks and three months. After the interval of the Maoist insurgency (2003-6), they have been back another five times. In all, Alan has spent about three years of his life in Nepal, and Sarah over two years, principally in the village.

During these twenty visits we gathered as much data as we could about what was happening in this small village as it moved from a remote shamanic world into the present, where there is a road, electricity, mobile phones, and many of the Gurungs have left the village.

One question in our minds has always been that of the best way in which to make the very extensive and unique materials we have gathered usefully available to the Gurungs themselves as well as to others.

We wanted to go beyond the often rather dry anthropological accounts which only reach a small professional audience and exclude most Gurungs. We also hoped to convey something of the multi-level experience which living in such a place affords - the sounds, movements, colours, emotions and encounters. This is very difficult to convey with words alone, though film and photographs by themselves also have their limitations.

We also dreamt of allowing the “reader” the excitement of feeling that they were actually among the Gurungs, a virtual recreation which gave a sense that it was possible to explore that distant world at first hand. Most anthropological and even traveller’s accounts are mediated very strongly through the eyes and brain of the observer. We wanted to make the materials directly available.

Of course, all the materials presented in this series have been filtered. There is conscious editing to protect privacy, and there is unconscious filtering because of our personal biases.

Yet the use of extensive films and photographs alongside descriptive texts will hopefully give a deeper sense of a world which very few can have the experience of encountering.

This goal explains the deliberately rough form of the films. They are largely unedited and as a consequence it is hoped that viewers will feel that they are actually present during the events recorded. This also explains why we have erred on the side of including too much, rather than too little, footage. This is a portrait which cannot be repeated now. The world we observed

has gone. Few have had the opportunity to make the kind of record which is placed in these volumes.

What we are attempting to do would have been impossible to envisage before about 2010. Recent advances in publishing, the Internet and online storage media, means that it is possible to attempt a new form of publication which could be called a 'Multimedia Book. This comprises texts, films, audio and photographs and can be available in various different formats immediately across the world, to be read on new platforms by people who would have no access to a normal book.

The question is then how the many thousands of texts and images we have collected should best be made available. All divisions into themes are arbitrary, and this is especially the case when dealing with a holistic, undivided, world such as that of the Gurungs, where social, economic, religious and political are all deeply connected. Nevertheless, we have decided as a start to attempt a series.

The following are either completed, or in the late stages of preparation:

The World of the Gurungs
Dilmaya's world; the life and death of a Gurung woman
Fieldwork with the Gurungs

These books extend the more conventional coverage of Gurung life in three books already published:

Alan Macfarlane, *Resources and Population; A Study of the Gurungs of Nepal* (Cambridge University Press, 1976; reprinted with a new preface in a second edition By Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu in 2003), xviii + 364 pp

Alan Macfarlane and Indrabahadur Gurung, *Gurungs of Nepal; A Guide to the Gurungs* (Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1992), 74 pp

Bernard Pignède, *The Gurungs* (in French by Mouton & Co, Paris, 1966; translated by Alan Macfarlane and Sarah Harrison, with new notes and appendices, published by Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1993), xlv + 523 pp

THE PHYSICAL WORLD



The Setting

By combining film with text, we hope to make it possible to see how an integrated, system of mountain agriculture works, filmed and observed over a period of forty-five years.

This is not a closed system, for the Gurungs have been wealthier than many of the other hill groups. The remittances from overseas work, originally mainly as recruits into the Gurkha regiments, and more recently as wage-labourers in India and elsewhere, has given a strong boost to the local economy. The money from these sources cannot help much to alleviate the daily grind of producing a living from the harsh terrain, but it does improve the quality of life in a number of ways, in the housing, clothing, radios, money for emergencies. And through various ritual and other ways of distribution, it trickles out from the fortunate families with overseas earners to other Gurungs and non-Gurungs in the village.

Many things have struck us during our visits to the Gurung village of Thak. One is the impressive way in which the Gurungs have adapted to their environment. For thousands of years the Gurungs were mainly shepherds and long-distance traders and it is only in the last few hundred years that they have come down to the foothills of the Himalayas. Here they have terraced the hills, adopted a buffalo and rice agriculture in the valleys, and continued to grow millet and use the forests. Their communal work organization and social structure has made this possible and will be described in another volume.

In a sense, what we observed in the years between 1968 and 2014 was a transitional phase in the descent down from China, Tibet and the high mountains. It was the few hundred years of army service and mountain agriculture before they spread out through Nepalese and other cities and the rest of the world. They are now in most countries and there are almost as many Gurungs living outside Nepal as inside. Yet they are still held together by a strong cultural tradition.

A second striking feature is the way in which the Gurungs have expertly used the steep mountain sides to their advantage in a kind of vertical rice cultivation which is an example of something

which can be found widely in South Western China, Indonesia, the Philippines and much of South East Asia.

I long wondered why the main village settlements were perched on the top of ridges at about four to five thousand feet above sea level. It seemed strange when the main source of carbohydrates, rice, was down in the valley bottoms, the *byanshi* as it is generically called, some two thousand feet below the village.

When I asked my friends, they said it was because the climate was better higher up, the 'hawa pani' as they called it, winds and waters. This may well be one of the factors for it is indeed bracing, beautiful and less infested with insects high up on the ridges. Yet there are Gurung settlements lower down and Gurungs adapt pretty well when they go down to Pokhara or western climates.

Others gave an historical explanation. The Gurungs had come down from even higher on the mountain ranges below the Annapurna Mountains at the end of their long trek, settling for a few generations in the high village known as 'kohla sonthar'. They had then fanned out, moving slowly down from about 8000 feet to 5000 thousand feet. When they arrived lower down they started to cultivate rice, yet also retained much of their previous agriculture dependent on the forest and growing the higher grains of buckwheat and millet. So they were suspended between two worlds. So the ancient village of Thak some two hundred years ago was at Gharedi and Mailo Dada, about a thousand feet above the present village. Then in the middle of the twentieth century they moved lower down, another thousand feet to satellite settlements like Panigat, Naule dada (New ridge), Uli and others.

A second historical reason concerns defence. It is clear that the Gurungs were split into small kingdoms alongside other groups, the most famous of which was Gorkha. Their warlike nature was utilized in the Gorkha conquest of the Kathmandu valley and the setting up of Nepal in the eighteenth century. There are old weapons in some of the houses and the old sites of forts can be seen in a few villages. It is much easier to defend a village on the top of the ridge, as the much more warlike Nagas to the East in Assam have found, than down in the flat valley bottom.

There are also very practical reasons. The villages are like the fulcrum or centre of the balance, as shown in a diagram below. The people on the ridge act as a funnel, transferring energy (leaves, wood) through the village down to the lower fields. If people had lived two thousand feet lower, the high forests could

not be easily utilized on a daily basis so half of their environment would be wasted. This is particularly true of Thak which is famous for its forest.

The cost of living on the top of the ridge is the effort of going down to the rice fields and lifting up the heavy sacks to the village. Millet and maize are grown at around the same level as the village, which is another reason to remain higher up, especially as these fields have to be heavily manured and manure carrying is time consuming and heavy work. So it is just the rice which would encourage settling lower and the intensive work on the rice only lasts a few weeks in the year.

Another striking feature is that what we can observe is a complex system, that is to say all the parts are interconnected. The leaves, trees, chickens, goats, dogs, vegetables, grains, are all part of a strategy. The whole thing reminds me of an orchestra, conducted by the humans, who call into play all the resources as needed.

I had not realized until I worked in Thak how much effort is needed to produce a living. Just providing a wood supply, or growing and processing a cereal crop, is an immense task. It has always been so long before machines and fossil fuels lifted the burden off the backs of a growing number of people in the advanced economies from the nineteenth century onwards. But the back-breaking work of past generations in England is as nothing to what the Gurungs have to do. This is chiefly due to two interconnected factors.

One is that the steep mountain-side, cultivating and gathering resources from land stretching from 1000 to 6000 feet above sea level, means that a huge amount of energy has to be used carrying and walking up and down.

Secondly, and related, one of the great inventions of humans, the wheel, cannot be used in Thak. Like the Japanese, who live in a similar rocky environment where arable land is very scarce and do not use wheeled transport, even the Chinese wheelbarrow, everything has to be done by muscle power. Some of the power comes from animals, principally oxen in the ploughing and threshing. But little is used for carrying or other purposes.

One of my surprises was to find that even after all the back-breaking work of preparing, planting, weeding and harvesting grains and bringing them to the house, there was still an enormous amount of work to be done making them edible. With

maize, there is the taking off the cob, releasing the separate grains. This then has to be milled, using water mills. With millet, the grains have to be ground in a quern, which is very hard work. Rice was an especial problem, getting the husks off is an immensely tiring and difficult task before diesel milling.

People in western countries are generally protected against the anxieties, risks and dangers that daily face the Gurungs. The weather is the most obvious. Hail falling in summer can devastate the maize and rice crops. Rain during the harvest turns rice mouldy, rotting as it lies in the fields. And once stored, the precious grains are gnawed and chewed away by insects and rodents who take a sizable part of the harvest. There is no insurance fund, and a minimal amount of food is stored for emergencies, so that the poorest who cannot afford to buy in grain face semi-starvation when this occurs.

Accidents and natural hazards are always close. The thatched houses are prone to catching fire and though the neighbours will help to rebuild a house and give some food, a family can overnight be reduced to poverty by this means. Landslips not only sweep away precious fields but also houses. Small landslips occur in most years. After such an avalanche of rocks, stones and mud, nearby families lie sleepless, fearing that their houses will be swept away too. People fall from the steep cliffs while cutting fodder and wood; some are bitten by snakes. Bears, tigers and leopards very occasionally attack people and kill many of their animals.

Also important is immensely hard and well-planned and organized work. Secondly the collaboration into work groups and the sharing of water, animals and other assets. Thirdly the spreading of risks. The mixture of differing animals, three main cereal crops, and important supplementary sources of nutrients in various soya, lentils, plantains and potatoes, all helps. Finally, the spread over the mountainside means that there are many microclimates, so that destruction by water shortage or hail or landslides does not affect the whole area.

The old have to rely on their children as there are no pension schemes except for retired soldiers. The sick and poor have very little between them and total destitution; only the charity of neighbours and family feelings of relatives can support them.

As for the strained bodies, living on a basic diet, people survived partly because of the seasonality of the labour. Wood and water and animal fodder were constant needs, but there were gaps

in the intensive schedule and a period of a couple of months of relative leisure after the rice harvest was in, which coincided with the Dasain festival, when people could rest and sing and dance and chat.

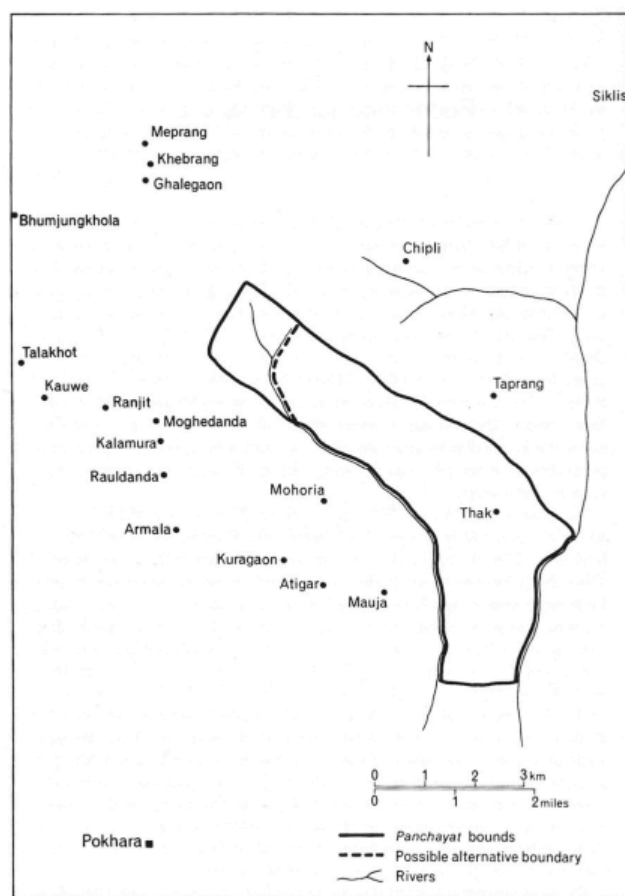
For I do not want to end on a grim note. Although the work was and is gruelling, and especially for the poorer who often sharecropped their land and had to give half the grain to the owners, there seems to have been satisfaction too. People knew what had to be done. The meals they ate were the products of their own hard work. Even for us, workless visitors, just walking up and down, the flavours of the simple food seemed special in their home-produced richness. It is a miracle that this system worked so well, yet also not surprising that so many have left when they could to an easier, if perhaps less integrated, life in towns and cities around the world.

Finally, it is worth noting how the village is caught within huge changes in the external environment. Here I shall just list a few of these changes in the period 1968-2014. There is the total transformation of the local town Pokhara. When I arrived, there was no road to it, people had to catch a plane or walk there. It is now a thriving modern city, at least in the centre. The growth of wage labour, especially in the Middle East, has led to new savings coming in, though the decline of Gurkha service and the settling of Gurkhas either in towns or abroad has more than offset this. There is a growth of tourism. Much less is manufactured in the village, though this may change with the road. The large outflow of Gurungs from the 1980's has relieved the pressure on land so that there is less share-cropping and the occupational castes are better off. It is a very different place to that which I visited for my first fifteen months of fieldwork, and will no doubt continue to evolve. So this is an historical portrait combining huge change even within an apparently continuous agricultural environment. I shall deal with these changes in greater detail in a companion volume.

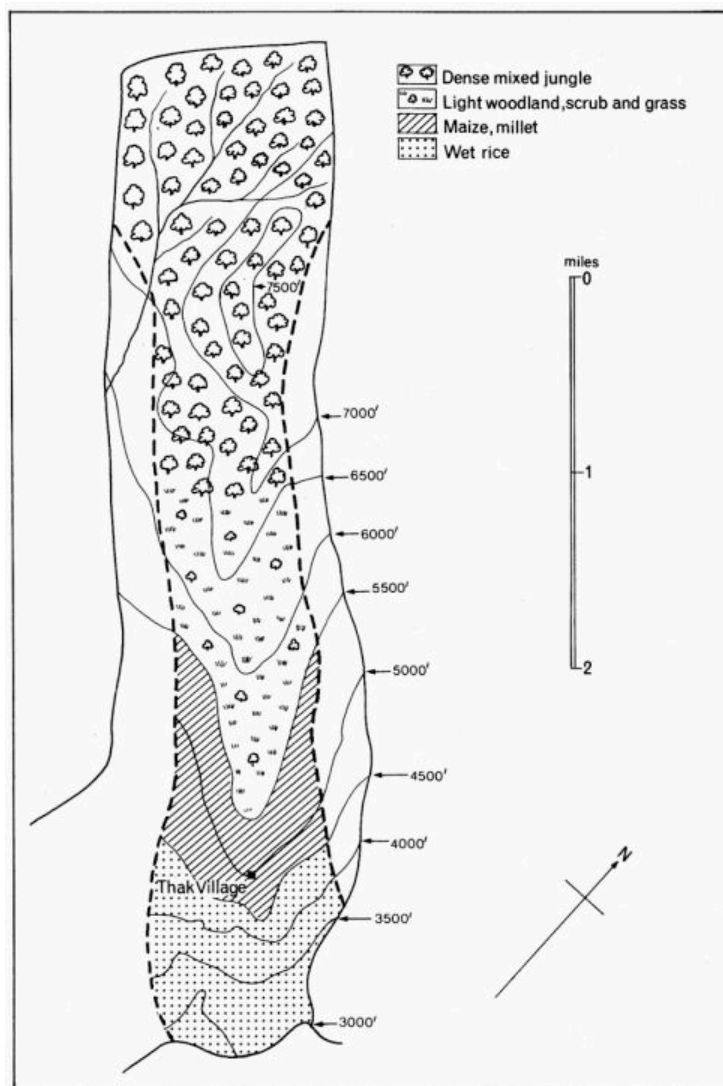
Types of resource in Thak

The natural resources within Thak village may be divided into three categories; forest, grazing, and arable land. These are not, obviously, completely separate; the forest, for example, provides fodder for animals and therefore may be termed a grazing area also. Nor does this include every type of natural resource; water, both permanent supplies and monsoon rains, is not considered here.

The area selected for detailed study lies within the *panchayat* of Thak. The boundaries of this *panchayat* and the way in which other villages border on it is shown in the figure [all maps and diagrams are taken from Macfarlane, *Resources and Population*]

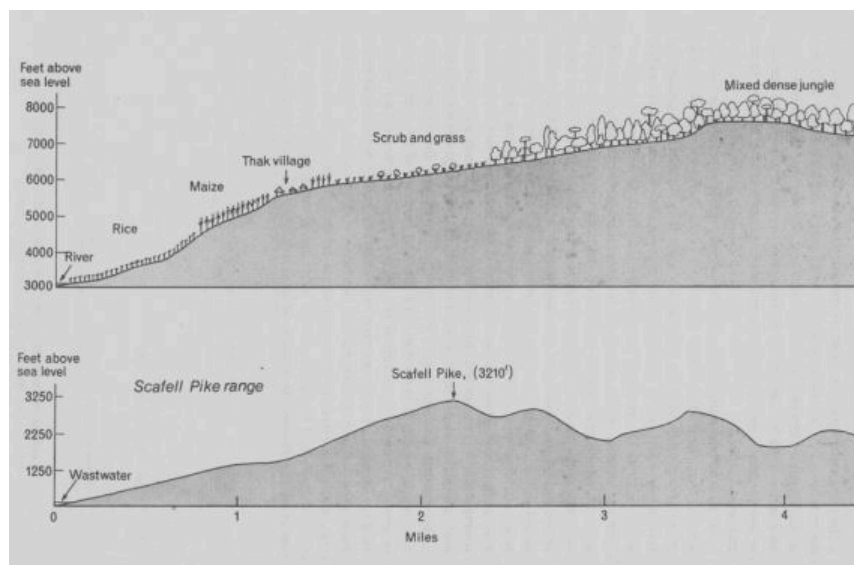


The total area of land available in Thak *panchayat* as a whole is approximately 10 sq. miles or 6400 acres. Given the approximate total population of 1810 persons in 1969, this gives a density of 3.53 acres per person. Within the whole *panchayat*, a certain area was the basis for the economy of the sample hundred households. This area can only be roughly demarcated, as in the following figure.



The strip of land cultivated by the 100 sample families I studied in 1969 extended from the Mahdi river at around 3000 feet above sea level to a ridge of 7500 ft; agriculture was practised on the side of a 4500-ft mountain.

The gradient of parts of the *panchayat* is brought home more forcefully to some readers by the next figures, which compares the elevation in Thak to a slice of the Lake District mountains which include the highest mountain in England.



The consequences of the gradient are many. For example, the variations in climate and hence crops between different levels was very considerable. There was a definite line beyond which wet rice was not grown.

The steepest gradient occurs between the river and the village; some 2000 feet in a mile. It is on this slope that the majority of the cereal crops are grown. At about 5500 feet is the border between grazing and arable, though a little barley and some root vegetables are grown above this altitude. Above 5500 feet are scrubby bushes, patches of short-cropped, poor-quality, grass, and small trees: it is an area where forest has been cleared and now goats and buffaloes prevent anything of value from growing. The map gives the theoretical amount of land available for each crop, but the actual area cultivated is only approximately half the

shaded areas because of difficult terrain. Very roughly, therefore, the present division of the area into half heavy forest, one quarter grazing and thatch, and one quarter arable, is probably not only dictated by the present number of the people and by what the land can be used for.

The distribution of 100 selected houses in Thak in 1969



Annapurna mountains beyond Thak



The village in the middle near the top



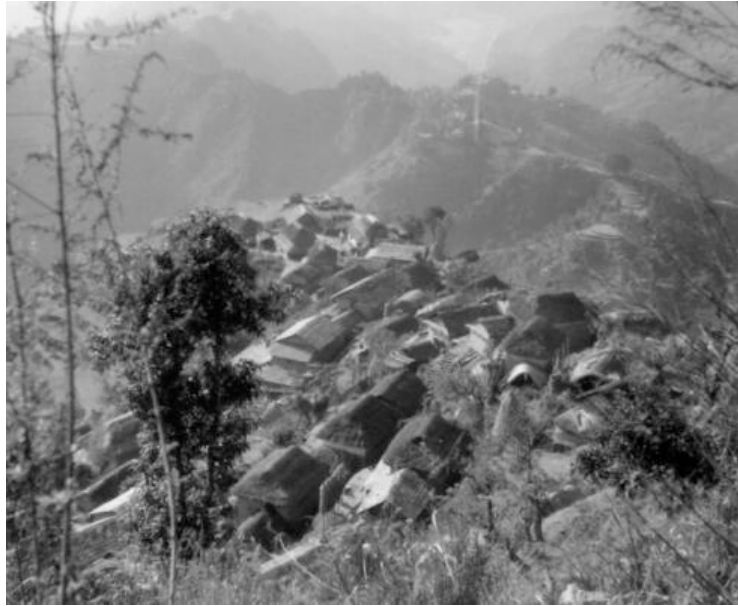
The cliffs below the village, which is at the top left



Looking down from the village



The Village from above



A short rough film made from clips taken between 1990 and 2001 may help to capture a little of the surroundings of this mountain village.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757321>

Landslides



Almost every year there are landslides. Sometimes they just destroy a few fields, but sometimes, as in this large landslide on the borders of Thak and Taprang, they sweep away a whole hillside, dam the river, destroy houses and people. The Himalayas are relatively young mountains and have always been prone to landslides. But the serious deforestation which has taken place due to over-grazing, need for wood and fodder, and the making of arable terraces has made the situation worse over the last hundred years.

Paths, roads and walks

Crossing rivers 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671075>

The streams and rivers which flow down from the higher mountains can cause serious barriers to communication. During the dry season, as in this picture, they can be crossed relatively easily, but during the four summer months of the monsoons the rivers are unpassable except by bigger bridges.

In the period since the 1980's the quality of the large bridges has improved considerably and travel to remoter regions has become much easier. But even these large constructions require constant repair and are often swept away.

Walking up to Thak – 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671761>

When Alan first went to Thak in 1968, there was no alternative to walking the whole way from central Pokhara to the village. This involved about 8 miles to the bottom of the first ridge, and then about 6 miles climb to the village. The whole journey could take about five hours at a reasonable pace, with a climb of about four thousand feet. The paths were rough and difficult and the small river had to be waded through several times. In the wet weather it was necessary to go on a much longer route taking a day.

In the 1980's jeeps and stronger cars started to drive across the flood plain and cut the journey time in half, leaving just the four thousand-foot climb. This shows the journey as we made it on our fifth joint trip to Thak in 1991.

Walking up to Thak – 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1693937>

This shows the journey as we made it on our seventh joint visit. There are resting places where heavy loads can be shelved and people can sit and recover in the shade. They are called ‘chautara’ and this is one half way up the first steep part of the hill on the road to Thak.

New road to Thak 2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671689>

Although it had seemed impossible in prospect, we heard in 2006 that a road which would take motor vehicles as far as Siklis was planned. A bulldozer did much of the work and the result is shown above as it existed in 2008. It went up above the village and on to Taprang. Each year parts of it are swept away in the monsoons, but we were told it would settle down finally. There are now rumours that the World Bank is going to construct a proper, presumably tarmac, road. The road cuts the journey time from Thak from the 5 hours to about one or two, but crucially heavy loads, as well as people, can be carried up and down, potentially opening up the village.

Celebrating new road opening 2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671156>

The considerable significance of the opening of the new road in 2008 was marked by celebrations. These included dancing, feasting and a ceremony where the donors to the project were honoured on a large engraved monument. The party was held in the school yard, and the monument is just beside the road as it reaches the crest above the village of Thak.

Making a path 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671492>

The steep rocky paths need to be kept in repair and constant landslides have to be remedied. Each household in 1969 was asked to contribute approximately 2 labour days (adult) per year for this purpose. Many of the paths were originally just earth, with a few stones on the steeper parts, but this shows the laying of quite a good path. It is just below the village of Thak, particularly welcome for those carrying heavy loads of grain up to the village as they approach the few last hundred yards of toiling effort.

Fetching stones and making paths 1988



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671276>

The better paths are made from large flat stones which have to be quarried, in the same way as house slates, and then carried down to the area to be paved. Each stone weighs a good deal and the effort even before starting to lay the stones is considerable. Given the very high rainfall in the wet season, it is essential to wedge each step carefully to prevent it shifting.

Carrying on the back: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671148>

One central feature of Gurung life is an effect of the fact that life is carried out on the side of a very steep mountain side, where the gradient is often one in three or four. This, combined with the absence of proper roads, means that the wheel (wheelbarrows, carts etc) cannot be used, so this is a non-wheel culture. Furthermore, because human labour is cheap, while keeping carrying animals such as mules or horses is expensive, there is very little use of pack animals except for longer distance carrying from Pokhara or elsewhere.

Hence everything has to be carried on the human back, using the headstrap as in this picture. The weights carried are extraordinary. A young woman, for example, may carry her own body weight of wood or grain up or down a mountain side of three thousand feet several times a day. Even children can carry weights which would be beyond the strength of adults in most western cultures. This is traditionally done with bare feet and on a very simple diet.

Communications and power

Mains electricity: 2006 and 2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2561192>

For many centuries the Gurungs like other Nepalis had no electricity. All the cooking was done with wood and the lighting used traditionally buffalo oil, and more recently small kerosene lamps. This affected every part of life and for forty years Alan had the experience of living in a pre-electric age.

Some villages like Tanting installed their own generators in the 1980's and had electricity but Thak never did this and it was only in about 2006 that the electric poles climbed up towards the village.

The film for 2008, showing the electricity pylons, and wires, is set against an electioneering procession that is passing through the village.

By 2010, as shown in the film, all houses in Thak had access to mains electricity, though the supply was weak and only really suitable for lighting and a small amount of cooking. The drastic cuts in supply, known as load-sharing, which afflict most of Nepal for many hours a day, also meant that people in the village only

had an intermittent supply. What effects an improving supply of mains electricity will later have if the supply improves on the demand for firewood remains to be seen.

Mobile phones: 2006 and 2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671433>

The telephone is particularly important for the Gurungs for several reasons. The main one is that they have long sent their young people abroad as soldiers and more recently as migrant workers, and the best way to communicate with them was by phone. Furthermore, the village is five hours walk from the nearest town and if things were needed, or there was an emergency, a telephone would have been extremely useful.

The first telephone in Thak appeared in one house in the mid-1990's, but the facility was very limited. What has really changed life enormously is the advent of the mobile phone. Here we see one of the first mobile phones being used on a hillside in about 2006. As the user, Bikash Gurung, explains in the film, by 2010, the mobile was everywhere – most families had two or three and it meant that not only was local life changed, but people felt suddenly very close to their relatives abroad. It is psychologically, as well as practically, a real revolution.

Radio and television: 1990-2, 1995, 2001, 2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671572>

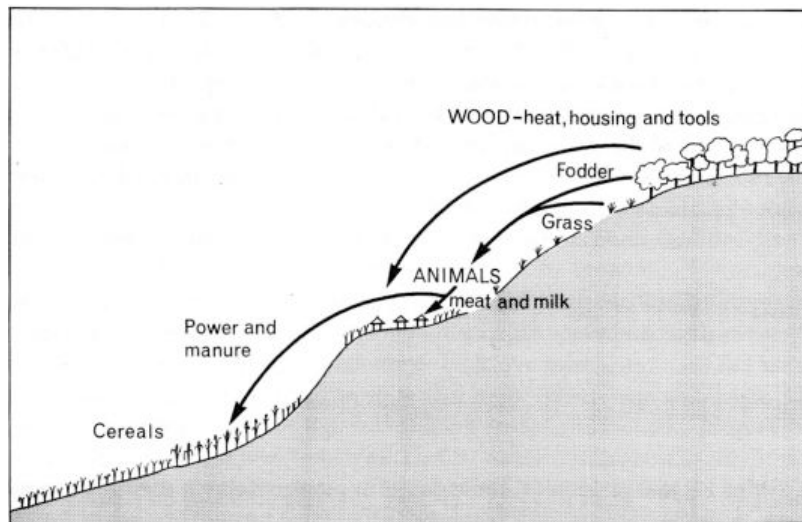
The first television shown in the village was located near the shop. As in the film, shows were put on for villagers and a very small entrance fee was charged. The reception was poor and most of the films were Hindi movies. Then satellite television and mains electricity around 2006 changed all this and now many houses have very good television reception. As shown in the film, even the houses in the poorest, Tailor, part of the village have television. Combined with the motorable road and the mobile phone, this constitutes a huge psychological change bringing remote villages into direct and immediate contact with the whole world.

Before television the village was to a certain extent connected to a wider world through radio. Radios were often brought back from the Second World War onwards by returning Gurkha soldiers, and by the 1980's they were quite wide-spread in the village. They tended to be tuned to Nepali radio stations and picked up national and a little international news. They were also used by the government to inform and exhort their citizens.

FOREST AND ANIMALS

FOREST AND PASTURE

Wood and fodder flows from the high slopes above Thak, through the village where much of it is absorbed, down onto the cereal fields. This flow is shown in the figure.



On its way, it produces many of the necessities of Gurung life; heat, housing material, protein, energy with which to work the fields, and manure with which to produce cereals (calories). It is because this chain is so very vital that present concern over deforestation and erosion is justified. Although erosion is not, as yet, a major problem in Thak, and the situation is much better than that in many neighbouring Gurung villages where the forest is already depleted, Thak makes a useful case study of the way in which forest and grazing resources are put under heavy pressure as population grows.

The Gurungs cook on wood fires and keep such fires burning almost permanently. Consequently, they use huge quantities of firewood. In the past, firewood was no problem, but continued prodigality in use does not suit an age of denuded mountains. Informants were asked how much wood they used per week, and the amount actually burnt was observed. A count was made of the number of bundles of wood stored up for the monsoon months when climate and work in the fields made cutting difficult. Wood is also needed for the framework of houses, and the villagers need considerable quantities of various bamboos for many types of tool such as baskets, ploughs, rakes and hoes.

A superficial glance at the scrubby landscape around the village of Thak shows that the forest cover has been rolled back rapidly over the last few years. Goats, cows and oxen are usually herded over the slopes above Thak and consume what they can find. Some buffaloes are also thus herded, but the best milking buffaloes are stalled in the village and are brought bundles of fodder. Cutting such fodder occupies much of the time of young adults and children.

Wood and leaves

The two major non-agricultural jobs are fetching wood and water. Fires are kept burning most of the time, and a middling Gurung family will burn approximately 180 cubic feet of firewood a year; about 120 heavy bundles. To collect just one bundle from the forest usually takes half a working day. Through most of the year dead wood is collected, but in the spring live trees are cut down, allowed to dry out and then split into logs to be piled up in preparation for the monsoon months. In the summer, people will be too busy in the fields to fetch wood from the forest, which is in any case wet and leech infested.

Cutting trees in the forest: 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671172>

The very large quantities, 50-100 bundles per household (each bundle weighing about 30 kg), of wood needed for the four monsoon months has first to be cut in the deeper forest several thousand feet above the village, using a very simple axe. If possible, older and dryer wood is felled, but as in this film, fresh wood is often all there is and requires a huge amount of effort to fell and chop into lengths.

Splitting wood: 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671625>

Once the trees have been cut and the wood chopped into lengths, it still needs to be split into usable pieces. Here a man and woman do the job together, using their combined skill and strength to use their axes as not only cutting devices but also wedges. A day's gruelling work of this kind would only produce a small part of what is needed for a monsoon wood supply for a house.

Bundling monsoon wood – 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671091>

It is very difficult to collect wood during the four months of the summer monsoon. So, large supplies have to be cut over the winter and piled up, as in this film, preparatory to being carried down to the village. Each household needs many bundles of wood and it takes weeks to cut it, then bundle it with bamboo cords, and finally to carry it down to the village.

Carrying wood bundles – 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671140>

The carrying down of wood is usually done in the spring, before the monsoons. People often work in teams, as in this film, and even children help. Each load can weigh up to 30 kg or so, and people climb up over a thousand feet to where the wood is temporarily deposited, then carry it down the thousand feet of very rough path to the village. They will do this half a dozen times in a day, punctuated with only a small snack in the midst of the day.

Cutting and fetching buffalo fodder: 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671268>

In the past, buffaloes were mainly kept up in the forest where they could forage for themselves, using their massive stomachs to convert leaves into protein, milk and manure. During the second half of the twentieth century, buffaloes were increasingly stalled in the village, which meant that people had to go up to the forest above and cut the leaves for them. This involved a walk up 1500 feet for an hour and a half, then several hours of climbing, cutting and binding the leaves into a bundle. Finally, the bundle would be carried for an hour or more down the rocky path to the village. Such a bundle would last at the most for a couple of days or so, thus making such work necessary several times a week. Much of it was done by women, who would spend half of a day on such a task.

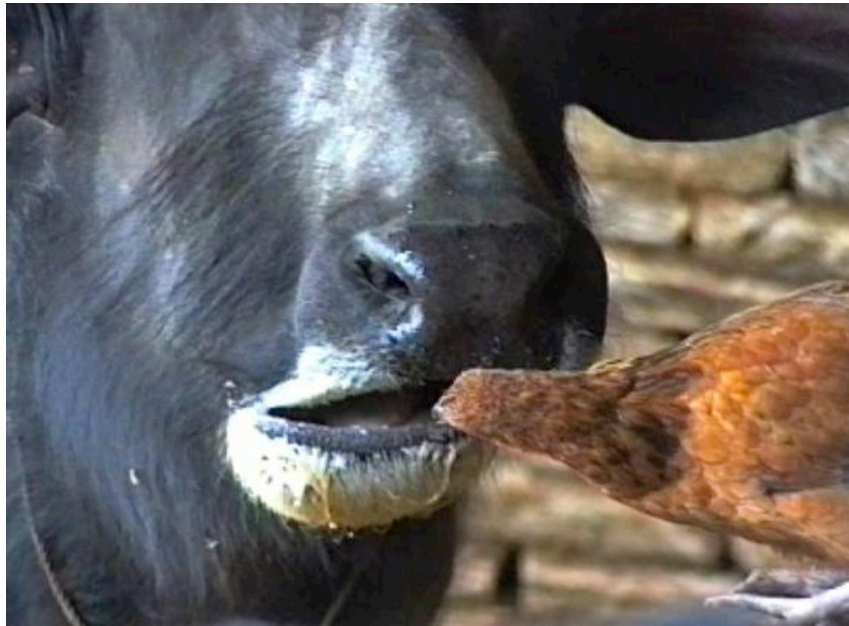
Animals

Historically, the Gurungs were animal herders, migrating pastoralists growing a little grain to supplement the meat and milk from sheep and cows. Now they are fairly evenly balanced between pastoral and arable production. The higher one gets and the further from the towns, the more important animals become, so that old villages such as Siklis, Bhujung and Ghanpokhara are still dependent on large herds of cattle and flocks of sheep and goats. Animals can only be kept in large numbers when a village has access to high pastures where the flocks and herds can be taken during the summer.

The goats are bred for meat, goat meat being preferred to sheep, and the sheep are kept mainly for their wool. Neither sheep nor goats are milked much. Buffaloes are kept in large numbers in both the high and lower lying villages. They are generally stalled by the house throughout the year so they need no summer pasture. They produce about seven pints of milk a day and a large amount of dung, and buffalo meat can be eaten whereas beef eating is prohibited by Hindu law. However, a buffalo stalled in the village will need some 12kg. of vegetation brought for it each day. The huge loads of grass or leaves one sees being carried are usually for the buffalo.

In villages where large flocks are kept, the migratory cycle is roughly as follows. In April, before the monsoon begins and the crops are planted in the lower lands, the flocks and herds are driven up to the high pastures on the sides of the mountains. Here, at between 8-10,000 feet the melting snow leaves rich grazing. The shepherds and herdsmen from many villages congregate and build temporary encampments where they live for the summer months. In October and November the animals are brought down through the forests and reach the newly harvested rice fields in time to eat the stubble and manure the fields. When the millet has been harvested they are moved to those fields so that wheat can be grown as a second crop on the rice fields. They then remain near the villages until the spring, when the cycle of migration starts again. This migration is not without its hazards. For instance, it is estimated that about half of all lambs and kids born each year in the Lamjung area are killed by tigers and leopards.

Chickens: 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671164>

“Each house has a hen-coop in a cavity under the verandah. Every evening, a plank is slid in front of the opening to shut in the fowls during the night. There is considerable consumption of chickens by the inhabitants, either at the time of family religious ceremonies, or on feast days. Cocks, hens, and above all the pullets have two great enemies: the fox, which slips through the village in the shadow of the high plants which grow in the orchards, and birds of prey, buzzards or falcons, which, after gliding for hours above the village, suddenly swoop to seize a pullet and carry it far away, despite the clucking of the mother hen which tries to put her young under cover. The guard dogs of the village will not directly attack a fox, but give warning. Thanks to the barking of the dogs, one can find out the track taken by the fox in the orchards. Men armed with guns make a drive and very often the fox does not leave alive. Its fur belongs to the person who killed it. Such a capture always causes a great gathering of villagers at the place where the fox was killed.” (Pignède)

Chickens are important because they can largely subsist without feeding except on left-over scraps and what they can find by

foraging. They are important as a source of meat and eggs for poorer families. They are also the most important animal for sacrifices in the various family and shamanic rituals, the body then being eaten after the sacrifice. Periodically a chicken disease decimates the village flocks, but gradually the numbers build up again.

Dogs: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671236>

Dogs have been a central part of Gurung economy for thousands of years. They were essential for a basically pastoral society, guarding the flocks of sheep and goats against predators as the Gurungs moved across the Himalayas on their wanderings. They were also used in hunting for deer and other animals. Here is a hunting dog, only a few of which are now kept in the village because the stocks of game animals have shrunken so much. Another kind of larger dog is also seen in the film. These are fierce and kept mainly to keep households and their animals free from wandering leopards and bears. Dogs also perform a useful function by eating up deposited human excrement in the village. But at night they can drive to distraction those who are unaccustomed to their frequent barking. Occasionally, also, rabies spread among village dogs and they have to be killed – and local anti-rabies medicines are deployed if people are bitten.

Honey hunting in 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2561226>

Notes by Alan Macfarlane

Honey hunting below Thak, 18 November 1994

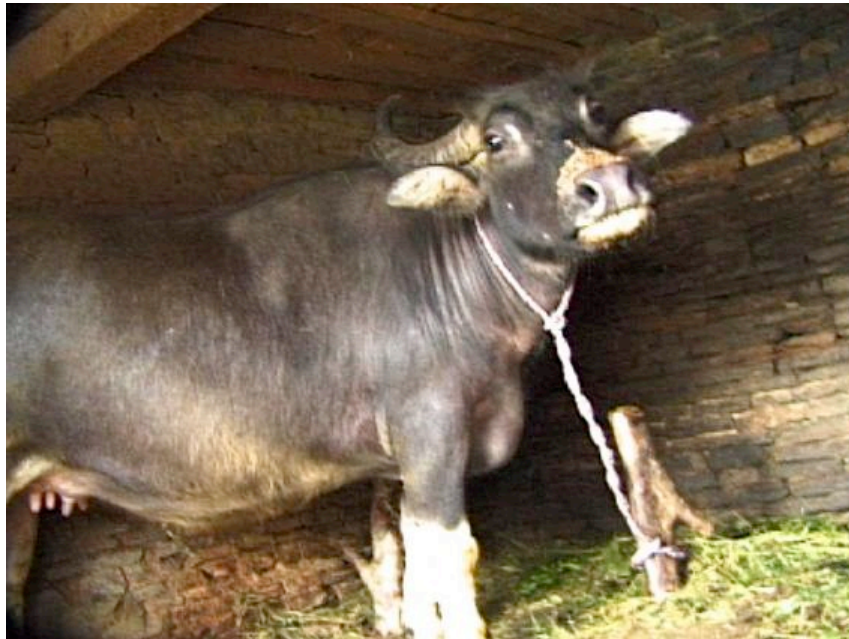
I went down to see them collecting honey ('khudu thoba') from cliffs below Chiyan. A very rough path and impressive place which I filmed quite extensively. They apparently collect honey twice a year - in Kartik and Chait/Tsait and also from other hives, though the custom has declined considerably. There used to be 'kwi themme' or honey masters, for instance, Badrasing's father, Lamme Baje, and others, and a sheep sacrifice was done. No one does this now. A small puja was done, using the same shaped pipe of bamboo as used in the Kusun, but nothing was sacrificed. This is done in memory of Aba Kahrbro, I was told. The process was to try and smoke out the bees (there were four visible hives high up on the cliff) and then to lower a ladder from which a man tried to knock down the honey. The first attempt was to fix pegs in the hive so that it swung off a rope and was not broken. Both times this failed and the honey was splattered on trees and rocks below. Then a basket was used and lowered up and down. Got some lovely shots of people eating honey.

The honeycomb - 'kwi nhaju' - is separated and the beeswax called 'maen'. This is boiled up and used for mending things like buckets. Surje brought up about 1" of honey in the bottom of a jerry can. The price of honey in Pokhara is high so this represents a reasonable haul.

Comilman (House137A) hanging from the rope, Budibahadur organising from below with Minbahadur (House94), Damaru Magar was extracting the honey.

Several kettles of honey were collected and it was obviously an occasion much enjoyed by everyone - a lingering memory of their hunting/gathering past. It will be interesting to compare with the book and film of the honey hunters and in particular to see how my film differs. Clearly my camera/equipment much inferior, but hopefully this is made up for by the intimacy of my filming and the fact that I was accepted and knew who most of the people were. Took about 45 minutes of film

Buffaloes: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671083>

In front of most of the houses, buffaloes are attached in the evening to stakes stuck on the terrace. All day they wander freely in the north part of the village, mainly on an unfertile stretch of thicket, and in the part of the fields left fallow. At about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, they come back near to their stakes, waiting for someone to tie them up and bring them grass, maize stalks, etc. They provide dung for the orchards and a little milk (1 litre per day) for daily consumption. From time to time one is killed for the village to eat. (Pignède on Mohoriya in 1958)

Buffaloes are a pivot of Gurung economy, for they are the machine which turns one of the main products of the high forest, leaves, into three highly useful sources of protein, vitamins and carbohydrates – milk, meat and manure for the grain fields. Unlike all other domestic animals, because of their huge stomachs, they can digest the rough fibre of leaves. The cost is the huge amount of time and effort in fetching fodder, milking and carrying and spreading the manure.

Oxen are central to Gurung agriculture since they are the only plough animals which are used. They are relatively cheap to buy as compared to buffaloes, and easier to keep since they are driven out in the mornings to graze for themselves. But apart from pulling ploughs they have no other function. As far as I am aware, the Gurungs do not eat them and though they produce a little manure, it is far less than a buffalo. They are used in pairs, and households will often borrow an ox or a pair from other families. The simple wooden drag plough which they pull is shown in the picture.

Goats: 1980's, 1990's and 2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671300>

“A quarter of the Mohoriya families have several goats forming a herd of 138 head. They live in small raised huts beneath which one can easily gather the dung (the floor is made of bamboo poles spaced slightly apart). Each morning one or two villagers accompanied by one or two children gather all the herd and take them to the fields full of bushes to the north and north-west of the village. Once a week, the goats, like the buffaloes, eat a salted mash to balance their diet. These goats give manure and provide fresh meat for the village. When a he-goat or ram is killed, its spiral horns are kept and attached to the pillars holding up the gallery. It is an element of decoration which, according to certain informants, brings luck. Ten years ago, the flock of sheep belonging to Mohoriya was exterminated by a disease.” (Pignède)

Goats were only kept by a few Thak families in the later part of the twentieth century. They can be herded by children and are useful for their meat, milk, manure and hides. They are also useful in serious rituals where they are sacrificed. But they are also very destructive, eating up anything they encounter. Hence they are responsible for a good deal of the ecological destruction in the vicinity of villages.

Mules: 1980's and 1990's

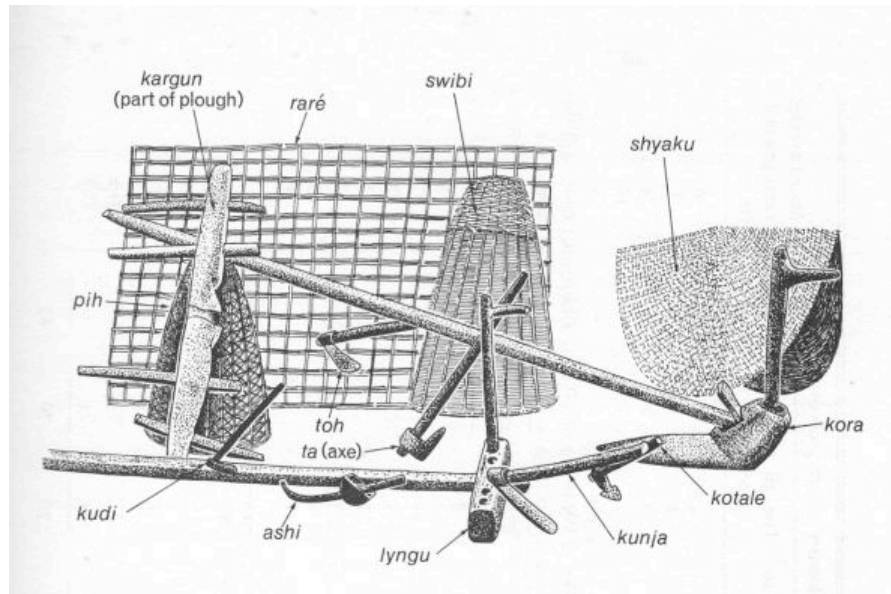


<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671441>

Mules are effective pack animals, carrying two or three times the load which a man can carry. But they are not used within the village as they are too expensive to keep, and even in the normal carrying between the town of Pokhara and Thak they were seldom used. This was puzzling until I investigated the cost of human labour and mule labour in carrying. The former was usually more economical, except for large shop-keepers who needed very large loads. They often travel in mule trains as in part of this film.

CROPS AND AGRICULTURE

Agricultural tools: 1969



The yearly cycle

Any traveller in Nepal cannot fail to be impressed by the beautifully constructed terraces hewn out of the steep hillsides. Huge efforts over the centuries have created productive grain fields out of the stony slopes. The basic crops grown in Gurung villages are rice, in the lower fields, and maize and millet above. These are supplemented with pulses - various kinds of lentil and small beans - which are sown along the raised banks between the fields, or in gardens. They also grow vegetables and taro in their gardens; potatoes are grown as a second crop after the harvest in millet and maize fields or in forest clearings. The land holdings are often small. In Thak, for instance, the average holding is about two thirds of an acre of cultivatable land per person.

If crops are to be sufficient and the village kept in good repair, a complicated rhythm of tasks must be performed. The main ones are as follows:

January - dung carrying, house building and road repairs
February - same
March - cutting and carrying firewood for the monsoon.
April - ploughing maize fields, planting rice seeds.
May - ploughing rice fields, planting millet seeds, hoeing maize.
June - transplanting rice and millet seedlings.
July - picking maize.
August - picking maize and weeding rice.
September - weeding millet.
October - harvesting rice.
November - harvesting rice and millet, threshing rice.
December - threshing and storing grain.
The busiest three months are May to July, and the least busy, January and February.

Rice

"There is only one crop of rice per year, as the climatic conditions do not permit the flooding of the land except during the monsoon. The earth is turned over once after the sowing of the maize is finished. Then several fields in which the rice plants will be grown are flooded as soon as the first rains have swollen the streams which come down from the mountains. The date of this operation is very variable. In 1958, the work was done at the beginning of June for the year was particularly dry. When the rice plantation is flooded, one ploughs, then one breaks up the earth and levels it with a horizontal bar fitted with two vertical hooks which scratch the mud, which is pulled by a pair of oxen.

Then the grains of rice are sown. At the same time, the walls of the terraces are repaired where they have deteriorated and the plants which threaten to loosen the stones are cleared. When the flow of water in the streams is sufficient to flood all the rice fields, the transplanting starts. Ploughing, breaking up and levelling follow each other; then, immediately afterwards, the rice is transplanted. Channels bring the water from the streams to the rice fields. There it accumulates until it is level with the barrier of earth constructed on the outside edge of the terrace, then it disperses and flows onto the terrace below.

In mid-August, the weeds suffocating the rice plants and those which push between the stones of the walls holding up the terraces are pulled up. From the 1st November, the rice harvest starts. The rice is threshed on the spot." (Pignède)

The first stage is clearing the lands of old stalks, weeds, fallen branches and other litter. The banks also often have to be repaired and the ground levelled for sowing. This is done by a mixture of light ploughing and hoeing.

Then a small part is made particularly clean and the rice seed is planted there. When it has grown to a small size it will be ready for transplanting to the flooded terraces. This work used to be done by work groups of several families but is now done by a single family or individual.

Once the monsoons have begun and there is enough water, the main rice terraces are prepared. This involves ploughing, harrowing (with a small drag-harrow on which the operator stands), and finally the rice seedlings are brought in bunches and carefully sown in rows. Small children learn to do this job, as in the photograph. Finally, the banks are made firm and the flow of water through each successive terrace to the next adjusted. It is very intense work and often the families will go down and spend a night or two in the lower fields working on what is known as 'Asar lava' (Asar being the name of the month of June/July). They live in small shelters and cook simple meals there.

Another enormously time-consuming stage, the first and possibly second weeding of the rice, has been omitted here as I do not have film of it. Again, it is back-breaking work and requires families to camp down in the fields.

Rice is cut when it is dry, using a small sickle. It is cut very low down as the stalk is also useful as fodder for animals. It looks simple enough, but when we tried to cut we found that the stalks are extremely tough and it took great energy and skill to do this work. It was impossible for us to do more than a few minutes as we could not bend over in the way which is so essential to many Gurung tasks. It was also hot and insect infested and was grinding work, only enlivened by occasional breaks for light food and drink and some laughing and gossiping.

Taking rice off stalks with feet 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671697>

Before the rice leaves the field, the grains must be released from the stalks. There are two main ways of doing this. One is again through human labour, as in this film of releasing the grains using the human foot. Again, it looks easy enough, but it puts huge pressure on the bare feet and would be impossible for people who are not used to such work. And it is clear that really heavy weight must be exerted. This is done when oxen are not available or the fields are very narrow.

Threshing with oxen 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671713>

As far as humans are concerned, it is much easier to use oxen for releasing the rice grains. They turn around a central pole and the rice is shifted about. But it obviously requires hiring or owning oxen. I have tried this and it is relatively easy to drive the oxen, though can be tiring wading through the straw pile.

Threshing and winnowing rice – 2001



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671705>

Another example of threshing with oxen. After the grains are released there has to be a further stage of winnowing to get rid of a huge amount of chaff and dirt. This is expert work using the wind to blow away the lighter material.

Gathering and piling rice straw - 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671424>

The rice is put into sacks for carrying up to the village, while the straw is gathered into stacks. These stacks are just temporary storage places, most of the straw later being carried up in huge bundles to the village where it is useful supplementary feeding for buffaloes and oxen.

Gathering and piling rice (Kongon) – 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671383>

Making a rice stack. 13 November 1994 (Diary)

It didn't rain last night, and today is cloudless and warm so they will be able to make the rice stack - 'kuni jhonba'. It then stands for about 9-10 days before it is threshed. They are thinking of doing it while we are in Yanjakot, but we would like to be able to film them doing it.

We went down to Kongon via Yunga. From the hill we could see that the stack was started but half the fields were still covered with rice, and many others had bundles waiting to be carried up. Krishna, Badrasing and Indrabahadur were carrying up the rice bundles while Bassur, Badrasing's wife, Om and Sunkumari made the rice heaps. They have had to work with less than half the persons they really need but at this time everyone needs labour. It is fortuitous that the election has given the children a holiday from school, otherwise they would have been hard-pressed to get the rice cut, let alone stacked.

Surje builds the stack, arranging the bundles so that the ears of rice are in the middle and the stalks outwards. The weight of the rice gives the appearance of a cake that has sunk in the middle. They put some flowers down before they start to build the stack, and at the end, when they have piled up rice the other way so that the stalks form a roof, they tie a bundle of flowers at the top. As

the stack grew higher, Surje had to use a log as a ladder, then he had to rest the lower end on a rock so they all had to walk along it with their bundles to get them onto the stack. We stayed long enough for Alan to film all the processes, then a rumble of thunder sent us back up the hill. Luckily it came to nothing though we thought they would be hard- pressed to finish.

Surje, Om and the workers came back after dark, but Bassur and Krishna stayed down at Kongon. They finished the stack, but there is one field where they have not gathered the rice. That will be used for next year's seed, and all the 'koya' and 'mas' had to be gathered as well

The extremely laborious work of releasing the rice from its outer covering is mainly done by women, who traditionally worked long hours doing this. Again, it is made to look quite easy by those in these films, but having tried it several times it requires huge effort and perfect timing to do properly. To do this for a couple of hours every day to produce enough husked rice for a family was a crippling burden on women. The recent arrival of diesel mills around the village from the 1990's has been one of the most significant improvement in their lives, even though there are costs, both financial, and probably through the milling off of some of the important outer shell of the rice which contains vital vitamins. Over-milled white rice has been a serious problem in many parts of Asia.

Maize

The cultivation of maize allows many families to feed themselves while waiting for the rice to ripen. The fields are cleaned at the beginning of April; the walls of the terraces are repaired. Then the ploughing and the sowing succeed each other during the several light showers at the beginning of spring. The heat is not too great and the earth is soft. From mid-May, the maize plants are cleaned and earthed up. A second hoeing takes place when the millet is transplanted in the shadow of the maize. The cobs are taken off between the 15th August and 15th September. In the fields planted with millet, the stems are cut close to the earth. In those where the millet is only transplanted after the harvesting of the maize, the stems are pulled out. The cobs are carried to the villages in large back-baskets. The stems that are still green are given to the cattle. (Pignède)

Fencing a maize field: 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671260>

While rice is not attractive to large predators, the maize fields are not only higher up and hence nearer the forest, but several animals, particularly monkeys and bears, like maize and will raid the fields. Fencing will not protect against monkeys, and only slightly against bears, but it will keep out wandering oxen, buffaloes and perhaps some goats. It is sometimes partly successful, but nevertheless much maize is lost every year to predators.

As with rice, the fields have to be cleared of the last year's stalks, and of other matter, which is burnt. Terraces have to be repaired and the ground levelled carefully before spreading manure and planting can begin.

Carrying manure 1997



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574177>

“Only the dung of animals is used, either of the large cattle, or of chickens, goats and sheep, which accumulates in the stables in the village, The manuring is done in two ways: The herds of cows and oxen are led onto the fields to manure them and remain there for several weeks, enriching the land with their dung. The manure is piled up near to the shelter in the open field where the cattle spend the night, and is then spread onto the land. This manure is composed almost entirely of dung. It loses much of its value for it dries on the top in the sunlight without the enrichment fermentation produces. The manure accumulated at the village in the buffaloes' stables the sheep folds and the hen houses, is carried in back-baskets and spread on the fields near to the village. Because of the lack of appropriate pits, the fertilising element of the urine is almost entirely lost.” (Pignède)

Scooping up the manure, loading it in baskets and carrying it to the fields is dirty and wearying work and in one day a person may make over a dozen journeys up or down a thousand feet. Many people said it was one of their least favourite types of work.

Spreading manure: 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671633>

The manure is mainly used on the maize and millet fields. Without such fertilization crops would quickly decline. The older methods, used until the middle of the twentieth century, of slashing and burning on the higher hillsides are no longer done except in remote villages. There is considerable work in spreading the manure since no kind of rake seems to be used. The film ends with Dilmaya spreading a little dry fertilizer.

“The ploughing of springtime is always preceded by the repair of the walls of the terraces which water undermines and rapidly destroys during the monsoon. A swing-plough is used made of a plough-beam, a handle and a massive wooden plough-shear, covered at the thin end (shoe) with a protective iron point. The swing-plough is pulled by a pair of small black oxen, bearing the yoke in front of their withers. The furrows are made following the curves of the level ground, parallel to the walls of the terrace. The operation consists of turning the plough at the end of the field, often made difficult by the narrowness of many of the terraces. The ploughman must lift the swing-plough above the terrace below, like a flying buttress, which he does on the outside edge of the field.

Maize is sown by hand by a person following the plough, in the furrow which will be covered over by the next passage of the plough. The sowing of millet is done with great precision. The earth is turned over by hoe, then broken up and levelled by hand, checking the irrigation channels for the flow of water. The grains are sown by hand, evenly spread and then covered with a fine layer of earth. To keep the soil fresh and damp, the seedlings are often covered with fern leaves.” (Pignède)

After a few weeks, not only the maize has grown, but many weeds in between the stalks. These have to be systematically removed, though they may be useful to feed to livestock when carried home. It is precision work with a small hoe, since any damage to the growing maize must be avoided.

The maize is harvested at the end of the monsoon, once it has dried out a little. The cobs are broken off the tall stems and collected and carried back in baskets. The stems are then cut and collected for fodder.

The next stage is taking off the outer leaves, and some loosening of the grains by beating them within a sack. Both are hard work as the maize is firmly attached to its cobs.

Maize – grinding: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671308>

The maize cobs are very difficult to use. A few fresh cobs can be grilled at the fire and eaten as 'corn on the cob', but most have to be ground. This is really too hard using a hand quern, so traditionally the maize was carried in large sacks for a couple of miles to a water mill, as in this film. Since the 1990's, as with rice, the milling is increasingly done using diesel mills.

Millet

“ The sowing of millet takes place in the first half of the month of May and from the beginning of June. The plants are transplanted in the shadow of the maize stems from when the first rains of the monsoon fall. This operation takes place during the months of June and July and ends at the beginning of August. The land is carefully weeded, the grasses are pulled up and the millet plants are transplanted out with their stems in the earth, which makes them easier to hoe. The harvest takes place between 15th September and 15th November, depending on when the millet was transplanted, and the temperature and the degree of humidity in the surrounding air.” (Pignède)

The millet grows up amongst the maize. There are one or more weedings to allow the millet plants to flourish. In amongst the millet and maize are planted other vegetables, soya, lentils and other useful plants which also needed to be weeded.

As with rice, the millet is harvested with a small sickle. It is not quite as back-breaking work as rice harvesting for several reasons. The millet stems are not as difficult to cut, and only the heads are cut off. So it is not necessary to bend right over. Yet having tried it, it is still precise and tiring work and a great deal of labour goes into producing a small amount of millet seed.

Separating and winnowing millet 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671864>

Again the seeds cannot be readily digested until they are carefully winnowed and ground. The grain is removed by using the feet, then beaten with sticks on a mat. Here most of the grinding is still done when millet is needed using a small hand quern. Again this is mainly women's work.

Communal Work Parties



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1674507>

Until the 1990's, when this film was taken, a good deal of the hard work, whether in the fields, or carrying from the forest or making of new houses, was done communally. Groups of people were assembled either on the basis of payment, or on an exchange basis.

Vegetables and pulses

“Many other secondary crops are cultivated in Mohoriya; potatoes in the highest lands, beans, vegetables, spices, onions, and mustard, in the orchards adjoining the houses or in several fields around the village. Beans and other vegetables are often mixed in with the cultivation of maize and millet. The fields are richly manured twice a year, and simultaneously produce two and three harvests of different plants.” (Pignède)

*

The Gurungs, of course, spend much time on activities other than cereal grain production. It is extremely difficult to calculate the amount of time on these other occupations, on animal husbandry, water and wood fetching, building, growing vegetables and other subsidiary crops. The Gurungs in Thak plant a number of crops in among the rice, or on the embankments of the rice terraces. The principal of these are called *mas* and *masyang*, varieties of lentils. Likewise planted in among other crops, usually among the maize, but also among rice, are *koya* or soya beans.

In a small, fenced-off, vegetable garden near the house most families grow a selection of vegetables, including *golbheda* (Nep. tomatoes), *simi* (*sibi* (Nep. kidney beans)), *teme* (sweet potatoes), *khorsani* (Nep. chilli), *pasagi* (like spinach) and a number of others. The gardens are cultivated by both men and women, though predominantly by the latter. The work is done in spare hours, especially in the evening, and is neglected when the busy agricultural season is in progress.

The fields where the main cereal crops grow are extremely important also as a multi-cropping area where other vegetables and pulses can be grown. They are sown in between the growing crops, which give them shade, and along the otherwise unusable embankments. Much of the protein for many families come from the soya and lentils grown here, and the plantains and other vegetables are much used as the main course alongside rice or millet in the meals.

One perennial difficulty has been that when a crop is harvested it can only be gradually eaten. This applies to all crops, many of which are dried (as with meat also), but in the absence of bottles

or deep freezes there is a particular problem with green vegetables. They are useful throughout the year, and here the Gurungs use an ingenious way of beating and storing them in long bamboo tubes with some added salt. They can then be retrieved and re-hydrated when being cooked later in the year.

CRAFTS AND TECHNOLOGY

Gurungs are not metal workers, and they do not use stone except for house building. In certain villages with good supplies of the right wood, beautiful turned pots are made for all the milk collecting and processing chores. Wooden water vessels used to be made, but copper containers, made by the blacksmiths, have taken over in the last fifty years. Recently plastic containers have been replacing the clay, wooden and copper pots.

Every village has access to bamboo and it is used in many ways. They use it to make temporary houses, animal sheds and fences. They make many varieties of basket for carrying and storing, trays for winnowing and sieving, fish-traps, rain-shields, and plaited mats of various sizes for drying grain. The simple house furnishings include bamboo stools and mats for sitting on. Men are the traditional basket makers, the workers in bamboo. Women make the house mats using thick grass.

A few women still weave in the winter months. They use a backstrap loom which uses the weight of the body to give tension to the warp. The spinning wheel is simple too, with a large, round stone in the centre to give it momentum. Women may also use a simple spindle so that they can spin while walking.

Textiles used to be woven from both wool and nettle fibre, and more recently from imported cotton. A certain type of nettle is washed, beaten and finely spun, then woven to make a coarse cloth used to make the sack-bags worn by men. A thicker thread is used to weave sacking. It used to be made into the skirt worn by the men, but these are now made of bazaar cotton.

In the villages with herds of sheep, the thick cape worn by men, and coarse rugs are made, the wool being unsuitable for anything finer. Recently, imported wool has been brought into the hills and is being made into Tibetan-style rugs for an international market. Although textiles for clothing used to be woven in the villages, all of it now comes from the town bazaars.

Various tools, animals and grains at a house: 2011



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671729>

This film taken in a very active house below the village takes us around the various grains and tools that a moderately rich Gurung household of a traditional kind would have available. It also shows livestock, chicken, goats, buffalo, vegetables, storage baskets, quern.

Household crafts

When they get up in the morning, between four and five o'clock in summer, and six o'clock in winter, they drink tea, always sweetened, and in winter given added zest with ginger. The morning meal is between nine and ten o'clock and consists of rice, or a dough made from millet or maize, called "pahingo", with dal and perhaps a little vegetable. This is a large meal to give them the energy needed for the day's work. They will not eat properly again until the evening when they eat another meal of rice or "pahingo" and dal. If they are doing heavy work far from the house, they may take a snack with them, perhaps a thermos of tea, and some 'pop-corn'. During the harvest, after carrying up the heavy sacks of rice from the fields far below the village, a meal is generally eaten to give them energy to go down again and carry up another sack. This diet may sound monotonous, but is it surprisingly easy to adapt to. One begins to realize that rice is not just uniform, but that each variety has a subtle taste and texture of its own.

After the evening meal, the working day is over and the social part of the day begins. There is much visiting, both by young and old, to chat or even to sing, but by eight or nine o'clock, most people have gone to bed, except possibly the young men and women who may sing and dance long into the night. The whole Gurung day is shifted forward by about three hours when compared with the West. This makes sense where the best use has to be made of daylight. One of the effects of moving to towns, with the possibility of electric light, is that people adopt the western day with office hours, and a consequent change in eating habits. The town-dwelling Newars have long had a 'breakfast, lunch and supper' pattern. This is beginning to occur with schoolchildren and office workers among the Gurungs, though they still try to stick to the village pattern of eating. Furthermore, town life has not completely changed their diet. They still, for preference, eat rice and dal.

The Gurungs are very hospitable. Visitors will quickly be made to feel at home, and if possible offered a snack and a drink. It is intriguing that in a culture which appears to have moved into rice cultivation comparatively recently, the most prestigious foods to be

given to visitors, and to give as offerings to the gods, are based on rice; rice beer, fried rice 'cakes', or boiled rice itself.

The main special drink is millet 'whisky' which they distil and is both cheap and potent. Most households consume several bottles a month. A fermented 'beer' is also made from rice or millet and is drunk in large quantities. Furthermore they drink a lot of tea.

*

My observations (in 1969) were purely impressionistic. Nor is it easy to speak of averages. For example, all the water in the village has to be fetched from a central pipe, but the time this takes depends very much on its flow. The pipe is often blocked or broken and there is an enormous queue, so that fetching one *gowri* (large water pot), which would normally take 5 minutes, can take over an hour. A medium to small household uses approximately 2 *gowris* per day, a large household 3—4. If the family's oxen are drinking at the house, the quantities may have to be doubled. Informants thought that, on average, it would take half an hour to fetch and fill a *gowri*.

I was told that it took 4 hours to cook the morning meal, and 3 hours for the evening one. This includes all the preparations; grinding the grain, fetching water and so on. Millet beer (*pa*) was brewed every few weeks and needs several hours boiling and straining. Another hour a day is spent by women sweeping away dirt, re-plastering the floor (which is done every day with dung and earth) and in general tidying. Excluding child care, which is divided between mothers and the baby's siblings, it would therefore seem that, theoretically, a woman could do all the housework in about half a working day or 4 hours. She would thus have half the day free in which to fetch wood or fodder, to work in nearby fields, unless she had a young infant to look after. In practice, if there is urgent fieldwork to be done, women often work a full day in the fields, leaving a child of ten years or older to prepare the evening meal. But in the slack periods of the year, housework and gossip and a little weaving fill up the whole day. About three times a month people spend half a day washing clothes and hair at the village tap.

The small open wooden fireplace in the central room, with a metal tripod standing in the middle for placing the cooking pots, is central to a Gurung house. The fire should traditionally be kept

alight all the time, though buried embers are often the only sign of this. In it a small godling resides to whom a small sprinkling of the meal to be consumed is offered before eating. Around the walls are some simple implements for cooking, though in this case a more expensive thermos flask is visible as well. The smoke goes out of the window or up the stairs, but the rooms are very smoky. The cooking can be done by men or women, children or adults, but is usually done by the senior woman, who, as in the picture, grinds salt and spices and then fries the main course, the rice having been prepared before.

Cooking and chopping up meat in 2011



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2623851>

Preparing a meal and chopping up meat on a board at Dharmakote

Making millet whisky (pa): 2001



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671416>

Millet whisky (pa) is of great significance to the Gurungs. It is the chief offering to the spirits and it is the main social drink apart from tea. It is made by a process of distillation, water being heated in a large pot, over which a smaller pot is placed which heats the millet. The exhaled liquid is then caught in a third small pot suspended below the top one. It can take several hours to make a bottle or two.

Traditionally the Gurungs were herders and hence the processing of milk was central to their economy. The main transformation is the making of purified butter, ghee or as it is known in Gurung, chyugu. Buffalo milk is used and whipped up so that the cream separates as with the device shown in the picture. This separated cream is then boiled and made into oil. It is used in cooking and occasionally for oiling the body or hair.

Operating a sugar cane press 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671476>

Sugar cane grows around some Gurung villages and traditionally it was cut into small lengths and either chewed or ground into edible sugar with a mill of the kind shown in this picture and film. I had never seen such a mill in operation until a television company set up this display as part of their filming in a neighbouring village in 1999. This is therefore a staged event, with the Gurungs asked to wear especially festive costumes.

Squeezing lemons: 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574208>

Various fruits grow well in Gurung villages – apples, pears, bananas, oranges and lemons. But the frequent hail and other problems have meant that as yet there has not been a large development of orchards. Again, I had never seen such a press for citrus fruits, in this case lemons, until I watched it being done in the same village as the sugar press in 1999 for a television film.

Weaving a basket 1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574239>

Bamboos grow in profusion around Gurung villages, various species being good for different kinds of bamboo work. Many of the essential sitting, carrying and storing devices of the Gurungs are made from bamboos and most older men and women were expert bamboo workers. Here a large storage basket is being started. This work is done in the quiet winter season and a large basket such as this can take several days to make.

Bamboo work: 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671043>

Surje cutting bamboo, splitting it, an old lady making fencing, another woman making fencing, Budibahadur making a sitting mat, another man making a loose mat, Surje making a basket for chickens, Surje making a carrying basket, another man making a grain carrying basket, an old man making a cord for a carrying Fencing is also made from bamboo to protect chickens and other animals.

Household tasks

The Gurung houses are half domestic dwellings, half the yards for farms. Hence, they quickly become very dirty and the surfaces of rooms crack. They need constant brushing and the application of a mixture of mud and animal dung to re-stabilise the floors. This work is done for an hour or so each day, mainly by women.

Food preparations in the 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671556>

In the past, most meals include a cereal and a little vegetable and seldom some meat. The vegetables often need careful preparation to get rid of inedible matter – stalks, shells etc, and this adds to the cooking time.

Household tasks 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671363>

The work of the household is never-ending. Here we see several of the tasks; tending the garden with the advantage of a recently acquired rubber hose, stacking wood and other work. This fills in whatever time is left over from the other tasks of the family in the fields, cooking, fetching wood, looking after animals.

Craftsmen

Blacksmiths – 1988



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671051>

The blacksmiths are a caste grouping, Blacksmiths, who tended in the past to live in a separate part of the village from the Gurungs, though now they have moved into the village.

Blacksmiths – 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671067>

Traditionally the blacksmiths made many of the simple metal tools used in the village. But from the later decades of the twentieth century most metal objects began to be bought in the bazaar in Pokhara and so their specific work has decreased. They are paid a small amount in grain or money for this work. The Blacksmiths in the past had a specific relationship to a number of Gurung households and also worked on their fields.

Tailors at work: 1990-2



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671649>

The other main occupational caste group in the village are the Tailors. They also live on the edge of the village and work for specific households. Again, much of their work has now been replaced by town-purchased clothes. Many of their children now go off as migrant labourers, so they have become relatively better off. They also contribute in a particular way to the village by forming the village band.

When I first went to Thak in 1968 there was a small group of houses well out of the village where the leather-workers (sarki) lived. They had disappeared by 1986 when I returned. Some villages also have gold-workers, another occupational caste.

Spinning and weaving and clothing

One sees all types of clothing in Gurung villages from the latest jackets and jeans of the teenage sons of rich men to the tatters of rough sacking worn by the poorest. Even the traditional Gurung costume has been changing very fast over the last twenty years. Children now wear Western dress, but women wear either the lungi or sari. A Gurung woman's traditional dress consists of a petticoat under a tubular skirt. This is much wider than the imported 'lungi', and is pleated to hang in folds in front. It is held up by a 'tigisa', a square of black velvet lined with cotton, folded diagonally and worn round the waist for warmth. lined with coloured cotton, and worn folded as a triangle at the back of the skirt. This is itself held in place by a twelve-foot cummerbund wound around the waist. They wear a velvet, high-necked, blouse fastened with ties across the chest. Over this a velvet cloak is worn over the left shoulder, and a head cloth completes the costume. The necklaces of gold, turquoise and other semi-precious stones still worn by older women, come from Tibet. Other gold pieces, earrings, nose-rings and bracelets are bought in the towns. Married women wear red glass or plastic bangles. When any of these break they are immediately thrown away as it is believed that a husband's life would be at risk if his wife continued to wear them. They are all broken at his death.

Men traditionally wore a shirt of the same pattern as the women's and a 'kilt' held by a belt, a sack-bag worn on the back, criss-crossing the chest, and a Nepali cap. All but the shirt are still commonly worn in the village, though mainly by the older men. Young men favour Western dress.

Spinning and weaving: 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671617>

The Gurungs have long been spinning and weaving. The loom is the traditional back-strap or Indonesian loom which uses the weight of the body to create the right tension for weaving, and the spindle is weighted with a stone. The work tends to be done by older women, particularly over the winter, and the main garments now made are the back-sacks which are a distinctive form of Gurung male clothing.

Weaving with nettle fibre – 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574264>

The Gurungs either used wool from the sheep which they herded, or the fibre from a form of very prickly and stinging nettle which they collected in the high forest. This needs a great deal of processing before it can be turned into thread and is unpleasant to work with. Recently attempts have been made to turn the nettle fibre cloth into an international commercial venture.

Building

Quarrying stone: 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671564>

Before building can start, the materials need to be assembled. Many of the houses are made of stone, partly because good stone is relatively accessible in the Gurung villages, partly because the group has been relatively rich from foreign remittances. Here we see a group of workers being directed by an older man who is having his house re-built. The quarry is just below the village and the work of digging out and splitting the stones requires strength and skill.

Fetching stone slabs and making a path - 1988



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671276>

Re-building a house: 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671580>

The old house of one of the main families in the village had become dilapidated, the earth and stone walls and the thatched roof were in a sad state. The film shows part of the work of re-building the house which took several months during the dry season.

House building 2000



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671580>

This shows the early stages of building a new house down below the village. The stone is in-filled with mud rather than cement and the work is done by a group who specialize in such work.

Carpenters: 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671872>

The tools are simple and the work rough, but since much of it is for house construction, or rough beds and furniture, this is not great disadvantage.

Thatching: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671681>

Traditionally Gurung houses were covered either with thatch, or with richer houses, with slates. From the later twentieth century corrugated iron tended to replace these. But many houses are still thatched. The thatching grass is of a special kind and grows up above the village where it is cut and brought down and then tied onto the roofs. A thatch will only last for a few years and then has to be replaced.

Other activities

When one enters a Gurung house, the smoke, darkness and low ceiling, make it difficult to see anything at all for some time. Having taken off one's shoes at the door to prevent breaking up the smooth, earthen floor, one will be asked to sit either on a bed in the anteroom, or by the fire on a mat or stool. As one's eyes get accustomed to the gloom one is likely to see numerous pots and dishes on shelves and the vague pattern of the structure of the house. Nearly always the Gurungs reverse the European habit by sleeping downstairs. The room above is used for storing grain, and baskets, mats and small tools when not in use.

The cooking area is the focal point of the house. A tripod sits in a square hole sunk into the floor and a variety of pans and dishes are used to cook over a wood fire. Above the fire is a large wooden rack suspended from the ceiling which is used to hang meat and fish from for smoking, to dry small amounts of grain, and to store some implements and rain shields. Around the walls are shelves with brass dishes, bowls and jugs, which are used on special occasions and are an indication of the family's wealth or poverty. Larger storage pots and baskets for grain, water, oil or millet 'whisky' stand on the floor. Other tools are wedged between the ceiling beams. Often one sees a toothbrush and toothpaste in a glass; these have replaced ash as a tooth cleaner. However, ash is still used to clean plates and cooking pots.

People sleep wherever they can - sometimes on hard wooden beds, sometimes on the floor on mats, wrapped up in rugs or cotton coverlets. There is little separation of men, women and children, though sometimes a young married couple will be given a separate temporary 'bedroom' made with bamboo partitions on the veranda.

Shops, traders and salesmen

Thak co-operative store: 1990-1



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671673>

This shows a short-lived experiment by Alan and Sarah in the late 1980's. A certain amount of money was given to the village to start a co-operative store which would sell some of the necessities which families would otherwise have to bring up from Pokhara individually; rice, salt, kerosene, as well as the usual biscuits, sweets and cigarettes and other smaller items sold by village shops. It was housed in the community former 'night school' and manned by an ex-Gurkha. It failed after about three years, largely because it was impossible not to let people have goods on credit, which they could then not honour.

Most villages have a small shop selling a limited range of goods - sweets, batteries for torches and radios, matches and cigarettes. In large villages the stock will generally include sandals, cloth, sugar, kerosene, rice, oil, noodles and even soft drinks for tourists. One can often get a cup of tea there, and sometimes a cooked meal and a bed for the night.

Travelling pots and pans salesman: 2001 and 2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671524>

Another commodity which is brought round, and again undermines the local blacksmiths, are pots and pans. The huge load carried by the travelling salesmen is shown in this photograph and film.

Shopping in Pokhara: 1969-2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671588>

Most families visit Pokhara frequently. There they can nowadays buy almost anything, whereas when I first arrived in 1968 in Pokhara it had very little for sale except basic foodstuffs. The centre of Pokhara has stores which are as well stocked as almost anywhere in the world with the latest electronic and other consumer goods. It is a first-world oasis in an agrarian economy which shows into sharper contrast the grinding life of the village and gives young people a taste of what lies in the wider world. Most families now have relatives in Pokhara with whom they can stay when they go down to shop.

The vast change in Pokhara is shown from the first short clip of silent film in 1969, in the centre of the city, to what it is like forty years later in 2010.

Water supplies and sanitation

Every household needs a huge amount of water, partly because of the need to provide a large amount for the stalled buffaloes, but also for cooking, washing and so on. Water was traditionally collected in large copper pots called gowris. These would hold large amounts, yet several were needed a day. In 1968 there was one intermittent water pipe and I reckoned each household needed to spend an hour or two a day to gather water. Now there is a tank above the village and a larger pipe and individual rubber pipes to a number of the houses. But there is still often shortage, breakages and other disruptions.

Toilets and latrines: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671721>

When I first went to Thak in 1968 there were not, as far as I remember, any closed in toilets for houses. Some had simple holes in a clump of bamboos or trees at the end of their garden, but otherwise the fields outside the village were used by both men and

women. When we returned in 1986 a few more elaborate toilets had been made, similar to ours above, giving a little more privacy. Then the local development agencies and government tried to force, bribe and fine each household into having a toilet, which partly succeeded. There were also communal toilets for the village, as in the film, which were never used and schools had to have toilets, again being shown being made, but these often broke and the children believed there were evil spirits inside them which would grab them from below.

Cleaning and washing

Grooming each other by combing and brushing hair is a frequent activity in the village. Sometimes, with children, a band or ribbon is put in the hair after this. Sometimes oil, either bought or buffalo oil is added to the hair.

Grooming hair and lice: 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671228>

Most people's hair is infested with lice for much of the time. So much of the grooming is done to remove these lice which are difficult to find and difficult to kill when found.

Hair cutting and shaving: 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671323>

There is no barber in the village so the hair-cutting is done by local villagers, sometimes for a small reward, but often for a friend. One or two become specialists. Shaving is minimal except after a death when the heads of close male relatives have to be completely shaved.

Washing and drying clothes: 1990's

The hard manual work and earth and dust houses and yards mean that clothes very quickly become dirty. They have to be washed every few days, either, as in the picture, at a nearby small spring about a quarter of a mile from the village, or at the village tap or in bowls in the courtyard. Rough soap is used for this purpose.

The hard, sweaty work and life in mud and stone villages means that the body very quickly becomes covered with 'dirt'. The Gurungs are a cleanly people and make considerable efforts every few days, when work allows, to wash. Washing the whole body is difficult in public space so girls often go off to local springs or rivers to wash.

There is little or no hot water for washing up and, of course, no dish-washing machines. So, every meal, which will produce a pile of greasy dishes and fire-blackened pans, requires a period of washing with cold water and earth or ash. This is done by men, women and children, though usually by the main woman in the household who has cooked the meal.

Health

The following brief account was written in the late 1980's, so parts of it are now less relevant since health care has improved.

Most of the serious epidemic diseases have now been reduced through vaccination campaigns; the elimination of polio, diphtheria, smallpox, tuberculosis and, most recently, measles have been the objects of these campaigns. Quite high rates of tuberculosis contracted when abroad have also been reduced. The area is too high for malaria and though meningitis is relatively common, serious illnesses of this kind are under control.

However, infant mortality rates are still relatively high. The principal cause of death is dehydration caused by dysentery, - both amoebic and bacillary. The wet months from June to September are particularly dangerous since the water courses, used as latrines during the dry weather, become filled, and the water is used for drinking.

Two recent developments have been changing the situation. In the last few years, piped water from clean sources has been brought to most villages and this cuts down infection. Secondly, techniques of oral rehydration are becoming widely known and adopted.

Primary health care is also being extended into the villages. Twenty years ago there was hardly any health provision outside the towns. Now there are health posts in every district although these are still desperately short of medicine. While the average medical provision per person in Europe or America runs into hundreds of pounds, in Nepal the provision is only a few rupees a year with much of the medicine coming through international organizations such as UNICEF.

In this situation, most people have minor illnesses of some kind most of the time. Children have colds through much of the year, most people have intestinal parasites, ringworm, roundworm and so on, most suffer frequently from dysentery and many complain of headaches and sickness. Many people have eye infections and the elderly often have cataracts. Scabies, boils and other skin diseases are common.

However, any visitor will notice that despite this constant ill-health, the people are almost always cheerful and still manage to lead a very active and physically demanding life.

Health in the village: 1980's and 1990's



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671753>

When I first went to Thak there were no local health posts, no health workers and the 'hospital' in Pokhara was really only a glorified dispensary. By the time I returned in 1986 there was a small health post in Taprang, about four miles away, and a village health worker, as in the picture. He kept a few simple medicines and could advise people on whether to go to the new widespread medical stores and several hospitals in Pokhara. There were also inoculation and vaccination campaigns against some of the serious epidemic diseases, as shown in the film.

Taprang local health post: 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1671657>

The local health post in Taprang had a small supply of medicines and could do simple diagnoses. It also offered some contraceptives. There was little on offer, however, and most people preferred to go down to Pokhara either to visit the hospitals or buy medicines in the bazaar. The medical situation in the hill villages gradually improves, but many people still suffer from minor debilitating and irritating and preventable conditions – worms, cuts, sores, frequent dysentery, coughs and colds.

A medical team visits Thak in 2001



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574314>

Health provision in the village has improved considerably since about the later 1990's. There is more money for the health post, and occasionally medical teams visit the village to check on various individual's health and to issue them with some medicines. Such a visit is shown in this film, set in the 'Night School' building. The change in health has become apparent on our later visits. Up to the end of the twentieth century there were often crowds of villages round our door asking for medicines. Since then, these have disappeared and apart from a real emergency, and the background of constant minor irritations, the situation seems less bad. Foreign well-wishers, for example a British charity twinned with a nearby village, also provide medical and dental help.

Visit to Pokhara Hospital - 1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714722>

I went with a friend to the government hospital in Pokhara in 1998. The conditions there can be seen in the film. Although there are some medical resources, it was then far from satisfactory. In the years since then a number of new hospitals, most of them private, have opened in Pokhara. For those who can afford them, they provide very good facilities.

THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE GURUNGS



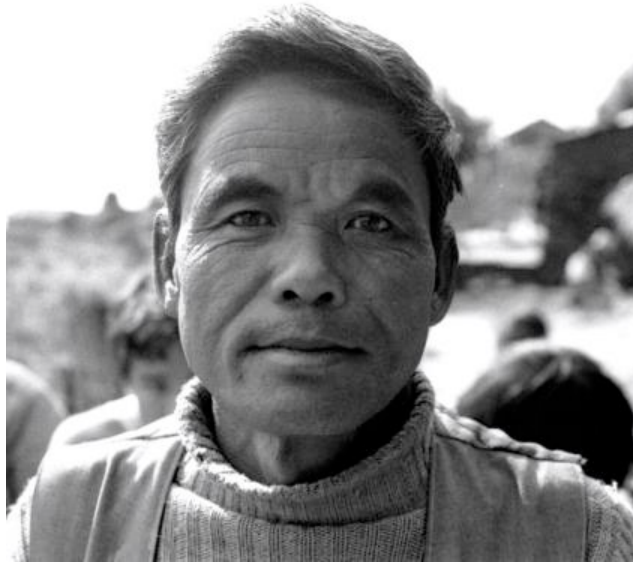
Introduction: A few features of the village

It is worth introducing a few background features of Thak before dealing with particular aspects of the social structure through films. In the past, the mongoloid societies of Tibet and China from which the Gurungs came had no caste system and within themselves the Gurungs do not practice caste rules. Yet for several centuries, at least, the Gurungs and other hill peoples have been mixing with the caste cultures of Aryan India and they have been influenced by them in various ways. They have found themselves slotted into the caste system by the Brahmins and Chetris, as a clean caste, yet inferior to the Brahmins.

In turn, the Gurungs regard the service groups who live with them as effectively dalits. Gurungs have traditionally not worked with iron, leather or made up cloth. Thus, each village has for centuries had small settlements of Blacksmiths, Leather-workers and Tailors who worked for the Gurungs.

When I first went to the village it was mainly inhabited by Gurungs, with just one or two Brahmin families, a Magar and some service castes – Blacksmiths, Tailors, Leather-workers - who lived on the outskirts of the village. Over the period from about 1990, and particularly after 2000, most of the Gurung families have left the village for Pokhara or more distant locations, so it is currently largely inhabited by non-Gurungs. So my account is an historic one, largely relevant to the second half of the twentieth century. Film of the Blacksmiths and Tailors at work can be seen in the volume on ‘The Physical World of the Gurungs’.

A Gurung



A Brahmin



A Blacksmith family



Another background feature which can be examined in many of the films is the relation between men and women. In many traditional peasant societies women have a low status and their world is carefully demarcated from that of men. What will strike the visitor to this and other highland Tibeto-Burman areas is the confidence and openness of the women. Although they may eat after men, though they do not act as priests, or engage very actively in public life, or plough, they otherwise do most of the things that men can do and are considered to be their equals. Women can own property in their own right, and as widows or only daughters are sometimes the richest people in a village. They run shops and businesses; in their husband's absence they often run the farm, hire labour, sell crops and arrange everything to do with planting and harvesting.

Even a short acquaintance with a Gurung village will reveal that, if anything, the women work even harder than the men. While men relax by talking or gambling, women seldom rest. It is assumed that they will marry, give birth to their babies without anesthetics or even a midwife, and breast-feed their children until a new baby is born, without stopping any of their other work. They are immensely tough, resilient and cheerful. They mix with

young and old men without any noticeable signs of deference. They join with gusto in the sometimes bawdy joking and singing, and they often lead the family rituals. Their blessing is necessary for their brothers at the festival of Tihar, and they play a crucial role in the memorial ceremonies to the dead. A detailed account of what it is like to be a Gurung woman is contained in the companion volume 'Dilmaya's World'.

*

It is important to understand something of the Gurung family since it provides the basis for the whole of their social and economic system within the village. What police, civil servants, employers, magistrates, psychiatrists, nurses and teachers provide in the West, is largely provided within the family. The Gurung temperament, un-aggressive and humorous and their ability to work collectively without quarrelling, grows out of the affectionate and tolerant bringing up of infants and young children. The elderly are treated with respect and, in the villages, there are few problems with adolescents.

The basic structure is provided by a number of clans. There is much contention and argument over this matter, but some older anthropologists have suggested that there were two main groups of clans. One is called the four or three jat (*carjat* or *songhi*) and consists of clans which vary a little in their names over different Gurung areas. The other group is called the 'sixteen-jat' or 'nine-jat' (*sorajat* or *kuhgi*). Within this there are more than thirty named clans. Clan membership is passed through the male line. Thus, sons and daughters belong to their father's clan and group.

The importance and width of the clans will be illustrated below in a series of films of clan picnics held over the years by just one of the Thak-based lineage groups.

*

There are a number of other principles, as well as blood and marriage, upon which Gurung society is based. One of these is physical proximity or neighbourhood. The central village of Thak is divided for administrative purposes into two official wards, but it is also conceptually divided into a number of smaller units known as *tol* (Nep. ward) or *naasa* (Gg. a small town or hamlet).

These 'maximal neighbourhoods' divide the central part of Thak into eight named sections; within each section there are subdivisions of 'minimal neighbourhoods', groups of neighbours (*ngie-mae* or *chema-gi*) who are recognized as having particularly strong bonds with each other. It is with such 'close neighbours' that Gurungs mainly gossip, do simple jobs and rituals, and constantly interacted.

*

The final thing to stress is that this is not a closed village world. The Gurungs have always been open to strong influences from around them and have migrated over the centuries through many countries, from northern China, down through Tibetan type of societies into Nepal. They are thus an amalgam of traditions and the men have for centuries been engaged in earning a living out of the village.

From the nineteenth-century this was particularly emphasized by the recruitment of many Gurungs into the British, and later the Indian, army as Gurkha soldiers. Many thousands of Gurungs, as well as Magars, Limbus, Rais and other mountain people have experienced the wider world. This tendency has been rapidly increased in recent years with labour migration first mainly to India, Malaya and then to the Gulf States and elsewhere.

The rapid growth of Pokhara and Kathmandu, the recent development of electricity, mobile phones, roads, all of this has suddenly turned the village into something different. The second part of this book will examine some of this expansion of village society into the cities and foreign lands. Among the interviews at the end are also a series of interviews with Lt. Colonel John Cross who has worked with Gurungs for much of his life and who has retired to Pokhara. He gives something of the wider background.

The Young and the Old

The closeness of the family system is emphasised by the way in which children are brought up. Children are very greatly valued and from birth are cherished by their parents. If a baby cries a mother will almost immediately try to pacify it at the breast, and small children are constantly watched in case they fall over or hurt themselves. Every growing gesture is commented on with pleasure and one hardly ever sees an adult strike a child in anger, though they occasionally shout at them. The devotion of older brothers and sisters is very evident and they will spend hours carrying the younger children on their backs or playing with them. There is little anxiety about the child urinating or defecating since few wear nappies and the floors can easily be cleaned.

After birth, a baby is protected against evil by having magical threads tied round its neck, wrists and ankles. It is fed on demand, washed and oiled daily, and spends much of its time sleeping in a basket cradle hanging on the veranda. At other times, it is carried on the back of its mother, father or siblings. The first hair cutting for boys is delayed until the village priest gives an auspicious day for it so one sometimes sees little boys of five or six wearing their hair in plaits.

Up to the age of five children have no tasks and just play with each other. After that they are expected to take care of the baby or younger children while their parent's work, and to do small chores like fetching water. As they grow older and stronger, more work is expected of them, so that by the age of fourteen or fifteen they will be doing all the tasks an adult does, except ploughing. There are no particular rituals of ageing except the boy's hair-cutting ceremony and the older custom, that between the age of seven and nine girls were clothed in adult dress.

In general, children up to the age of five are cosseted but older children are treated like young adults. They obviously respect their elders, but are in no way deferential. This affectionate upbringing leads to a very closely bonded family. Sons are close to their mothers and respect their fathers throughout their lives. They accept parental rulings on matters such as marriage and the choice of a career which would not be tolerated in the West. They assume it is their duty to protect and provide for their parents in

old age, just as they have been supported and protected in childhood.

The Young



THE YOUNG

Children playing – 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/>

Children playing – 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714894>

Children imitating dances and playing– 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714914>

Children observed 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714837>

Children gambling – 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714817>

Babies observed – 1993-2000



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714760>

Children observed – 1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714760>

Children painting and drawing – 2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712203>

THE OLD



Although infant and child mortality rates were traditionally high, an individual who survives to the age of ten is quite likely to live into his seventies or eighties. Thus, a visitor to a Gurung village will see many old men and women. Two features of their life are worth mentioning. Firstly, they never lose their economic, social or ritual functions. Until death the old can be useful. They spin and weave, make baskets and mats, beat millet, pod beans, watch the babies and generally enable the young to get on with the heavier tasks. They are not seen as a drain on the wealth of a family. Furthermore, as they grow older, their spiritual position improves. They intercede with the spirits, go on pilgrimages, lead family rituals and act as the family priest.

In western societies, parents lavish a good deal of care, affection and money on their children, who then leave home and do the same for their own children. Little is expected in return except minimal respect, occasional visits and perhaps a little help in old age. In Gurung society children give as much as they receive; the parents can expect as of right that their children will respect them, honour them when they are old, and support them in every possible way. This is the most sacred duty. In the village, the idea of 'old peoples' homes' could not be further away from Gurung philosophy.

Children playing and with grandparents



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714779>

The old and the young



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2051818>

Formal Education

There has been a significant change in the pattern of childhood during the last forty years with the introduction of compulsory schooling. Every village now has access to a school and education is compulsory to fifth grade. Most children go to school. Although there is often a shortage of equipment – paper, pens, maps and books - children are introduced to other languages (Nepali and English), mathematics and science, as well as more practical things like health education and diet. Furthermore, education gives them a vision of a world outside the village and the possibility of escape from a life of grinding toil. Their parents, too, often place an extremely high value on education.

For the many who can't aspire to town life, a child's role in the family still requires much physical labour. A typical day might start with a climb to the forest to fetch wood or fodder followed by a meal. Then school from ten to four o'clock and possibly a long walk to reach it. On returning from school, there will be further work in the fields or around the house. At holidays and weekends they will work alongside their elders.

All this changes when children leave for schools in towns. Even if their parents stay in the village, their roots wither fast. The bazaars, tea-shops, cinemas, cars and buses enlarge their world and although they may return from time to time to the village, they rarely take any part in the work of the farm. The town schoolboy is often easy to distinguish from the village boy by his smart clothes and shoes. He is being trained to join an urban bureaucratic way of life.

Again, the best way to examine school life is through film. When I first went to Thak in 1969 there was only one school (teaching years 1-5) in the village area, and it was an hour down a very steep mountain side. Then in the 1980's a primary school was built above the village. This is the school which features in most of the films. More recently a secondary school has been built, again one hour down from the village.

So most of the film shows the very rough conditions in one primary school in the 1990's. The schools in Pokhara, represented by the last film, are a world away from what is shown in the earlier films, and even in the villages, the standard of schooling is

now improving quite rapidly and the scenes in these films are becoming a thing of the past.

THAK PRIMARY SCHOOL

1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712619>

1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712655>

1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712695>

1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712664>

Glimpses of the education of one girl in Thak



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712287>

A POKHARA SCHOOL IN 2000



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751226>

Visit to Hill Top School – 17.12.2000

From our diary:

We went from there to Hill Top School where Manu was recently a student and head girl. We were shown the science lab - 2 microscopes, 1 pair of scales and a few glass flasks and a burner - very little indeed. We saw a science lesson in progress with class 6, on James Watt and temperature. All chalk and talk and reliance on the appropriate text book for this stage in school. We saw the computer room. There were about 9 - 10 computers, all of different vintages. They have a small library and adjacent reading room and in all things are trying to provide a good education within the limitations of resources.

Feasts, Festivals and Sports

Although much of life in the village has been one of grinding work and shortages of much of what people in more affluent societies would consider to be essentials such as running water, electricity, a good diet, warm clothing, nevertheless ordinary life is sometimes punctuated by special occasions. It is on these occasions, when people eat, dance or pray together that we can see society at work. Here are a few of those which we witnessed and filmed.

A communal feast in 1992



<http://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574501>

Village feast – 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712949>

Village feast 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712957>

Extended family having a feast together – 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1714741>

Celebrations at Thak school 2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712116>

VILLAGE SPORTS

New year's day sports at Siklis in 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751186>

Volleyball 1988



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751186>

Village swing - 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751210>

Village swings and volleyball 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1713017>

Village sacrifice and swings – 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712996>

Music - dancing, singing and the Tailor's band

As shepherds, the Gurungs danced their way across the Himalayas, and they still love to dance and sing. There are still occasionally evenings when one hears the sound of a double-ended drum and a group of girls and boys singing. Traditionally the songs were in the Gurung language. Today, they tend to sing Nepali 'pop' songs. They are often extremely catchy, and boys and girls dance together or singly, performing for the rest of the group. Words alone cannot convey the animation and beauty of the dances, secular and sacred, in Gurung villages. Here are a few examples.

Dancing and singing at a funeral – 1991



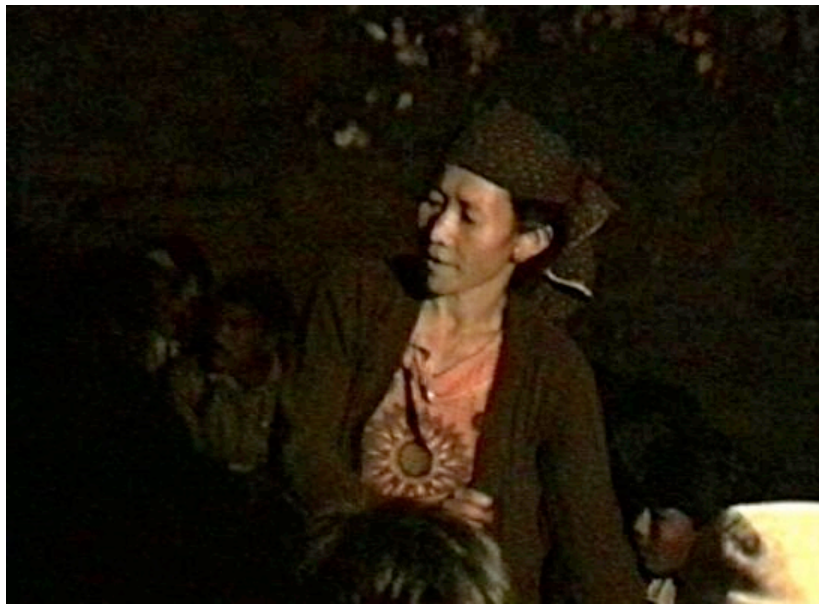
<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712260>

Singing in a Gurung house – 1992



<https://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2576046>

Village dance – 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712917>

Non-Gurungs dancing – 1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751178>

Dancing and sheep feast – 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712241>

Visit to Pwelu school – dancing – 2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712210>

TAILOR'S BAND

Musicians – 1992



1993-4



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712534>

Tailor's band instruments 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712556>

2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712599>

Society and Ritual

Gurung social structure is made visible and reinforced by the numerous rituals which occur in a Gurung village. Perhaps most explicitly this can be seen in the two main sets of rituals at marriage and death. These are dealt with more fully in the book on 'The Spiritual Life of the Gurungs'.

Here I will include just two examples of films which illustrate society manifested through rituals.

A Gurung Wedding on 2.4.1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641112>

The burial or cremation is an occasion for relatives, friends and neighbours to show their feelings of respect for the deceased and the close family. There are numerous family rituals which are also occasions to re-affirm social relations and to express closeness. A number of these can be seen in the volume on 'Spiritual Life of the Gurungs'. There are many other semi ritual, semi social events. One example is:

Opening of a shrine in 1997



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712123>

Society and Power

At the village level, power relations are pervasive, but incorporated into family, economic and ritual relations. Here are just three small instances of explicitly political occasions which I filmed.

A group of people from outside Thak electioneering through the village - 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751194>

School governor's meeting – 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712495>

This meeting is one of the few occasions where it is possible to see local politics in action is at the meeting of the school governors, as at this meeting.

Similar meetings occurred periodically when the village was run by a local government or Panchayat system, as in the 1990's. These meetings were dominated by men, though some women would occasionally attend and speak. Here is a photo of one such meeting.



**THE VIRTUAL VILLAGE IN A
WIDER WORLD**

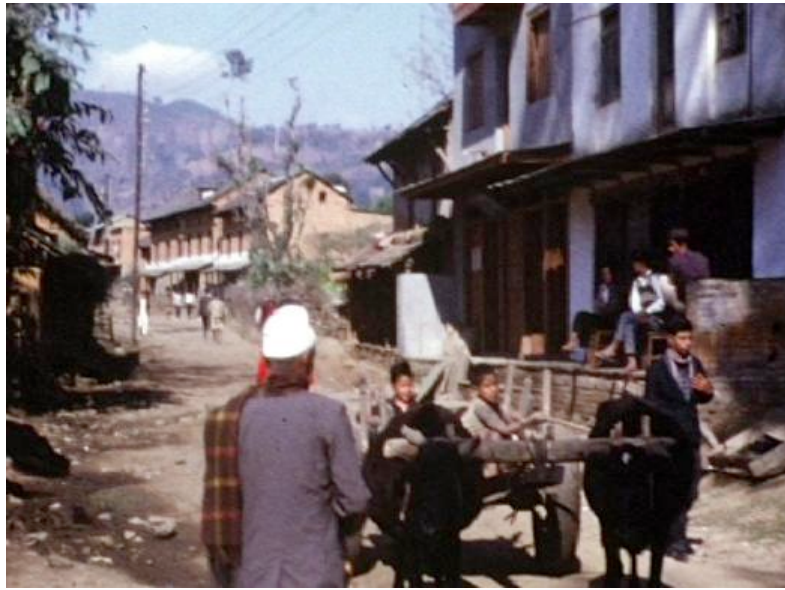
Changing Pokhara

Pokhara was a remote and backward small town when I arrived by plane there in December 1969, as the first film below shows. There were only two or three hotels, half a dozen cars (which had been carried there in parts as there was no motorable road) and no electricity. The population was mainly non-Gurung and numbered a few tens of thousands. The shops contained almost nothing beyond simple foodstuffs and clothing.

The series of films below shows the extraordinary development that has occurred in the last forty years, gathering momentum over time and turning Pokhara into a bustling city with hundreds of thousands of inhabitants. There are thousands of cars and motorbikes, many schools, numerous hospitals and one can buy almost anything. There is even talk now of an international airport to be located nearby.

When I first arrived there were very few Gurungs from Thak in Pokhara. Now the majority of those who once lived in Thak are there. They have their village organizations, their rituals and their clan ties. A recently built motorable road to Thak as well as mobile phones, have converted Thak into a virtual suburb of Pokhara. And Pokhara itself, with internet and roads, is, at its heart, and certainly in its house prices and gleaming new amenities, not much different from many burgeoning cities across Asia. This amazing transformation has been recorded in these films, as have the changes we shall examine in family and individual lives.

1969



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712737>

1987



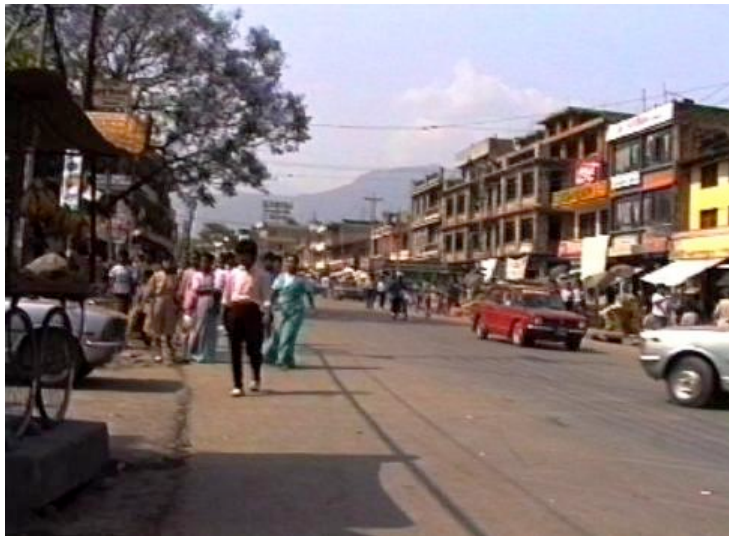
<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712756>

1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712776>

1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712783>

1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712802>

2001



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712833>

2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712840>

2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712860>

2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712910>

2014



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712891>

GURUNG LIFE IN POKHARA

Visit to the Thak Village Association [samaj] in 1997



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757007>

Night dancing in Pokhara in 2001



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712378>

Visit to the Thak Samaj in 2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751268>

Visit to house warming party, December 1995



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712309>

Visit to new house - 1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751218>

Gurung wedding celebration in 2001



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641021>

Ritual Life

Ancestor ritual in Pokhara in 2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712716>

Surje Memorial Service (Pae) in 2014

The pae (described in detail in the other volumes on 'Spiritual Life'), is the memorial ritual held to take the soul of the deceased person to the land of the dead. This is the ritual as performed in Pokhara for Alan's adopted brother-in-law, Surje Gurung.

Part 1



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712524>

Part 2



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712515>

A Gurung Family in Pokhara

When I first arrived in Thak at the end of 1968 I was adopted into the family of Lt. Bhuwansing Gurung. When his older son died tragically young, in some way I replaced him. So, Sarah and I have become very close to the family and spent much time with his family on our visits to Nepal.

In between my first visit and my return in 1986 he and his wife had moved down to Pokhara. I filmed in his home and at the lineage picnics which he arranged annually to coincide with our visits.

These films, like those of Pokhara, provide a great deal of information on a changing world, this time within the context of a particular family, that of a middling level Gurung. Much of what I know about the Gurungs derives from the support which they have given to us.

When we first met the family in 1969





When we met the family again in 1986





Bhuwansing in 1987



The family in 1990



FILMS OF THE FAMILY

1988



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1711948>

1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712086>

1995



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1711989>

1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712009>

1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712030>

2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712050>

2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712079>

Family festival in 1999 in Pokhara



<https://sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2576137>

Clan picnics – the Kebje clan in Pokhara

As adopted members of the Kebje clan, we were fortunate to attend a number of annual clan picnics, originally inspired by the energy and organizational ability of my adopted ‘father’ Lt. Bhuwansing Gurung. These were often timed to coincide with our visits. I have film of six, covering a period of 24 years. I have edited these only slightly since they will become historical documents, showing the changing costumes, ethnic markers, wealth and social relations of one group of the Pokhara Gurungs.

Kebje family picnic at Begnas Tal 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1708048>

Picnic at a river on the outskirts of Pokhara - 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1708056>

Picnic at a temple on a hill above Pokhara - 1997



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1708090>

Picnic at a temple on a hill above Pokhara - 2000



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1708122>

Clan picnic in 2014

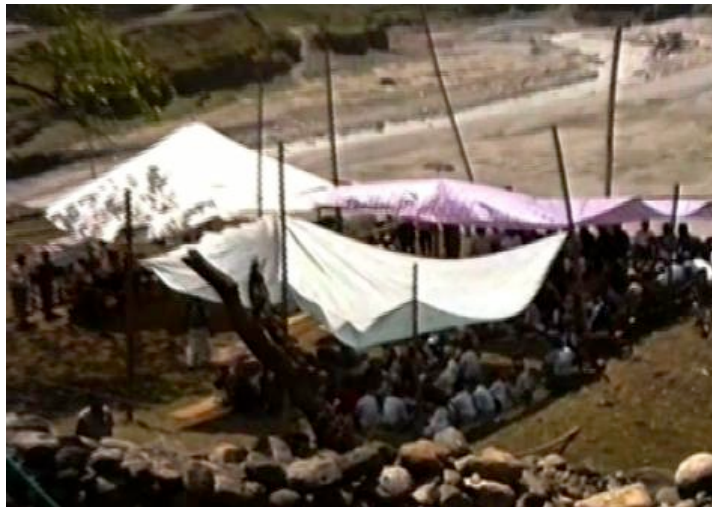


<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1708129>

Gurung Cultural Identity

As the Gurungs moved down from the hills and into the cities of Nepal or abroad, their sense of losing aspects of their customs and traditions became stronger. In particular, a number of them were worried that the rituals and myths which they had carried through their long migrations and were preserved by their traditional priests would be lost. As a frequent visitor to the village, and working with one of the most knowledgeable and interested of older Gurungs, Lt. Indrabahadur Gurung, with whom I had published a short summary of Gurung life in 1990 ('Guide to the Gurungs') I was naturally interested in this phenomenon. Like my Gurung friends I felt strongly that as much as possible of the rich religious traditions of the Gurungs should be documented and preserved. The explicit moment when the setting up of a Gurung cultural centre in Pokhara was planned was at a meeting of many of the Poju and Klehbri priests on 5th May 1992.

The meeting to set up the Gurung Cultural Centre (T.P.L.S) 1992



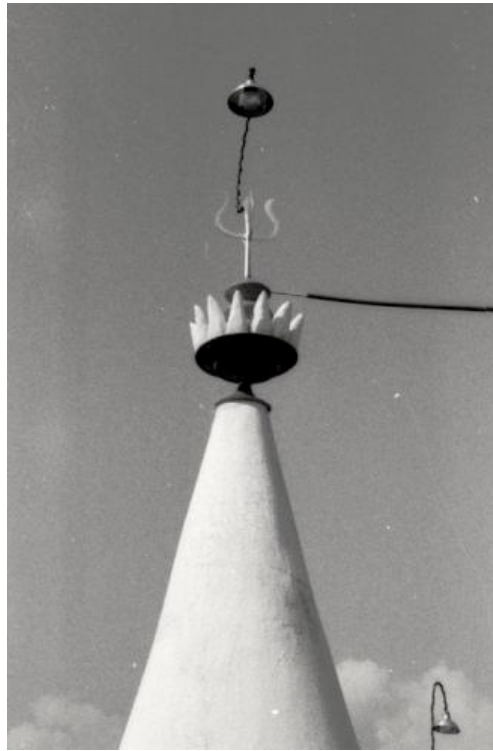
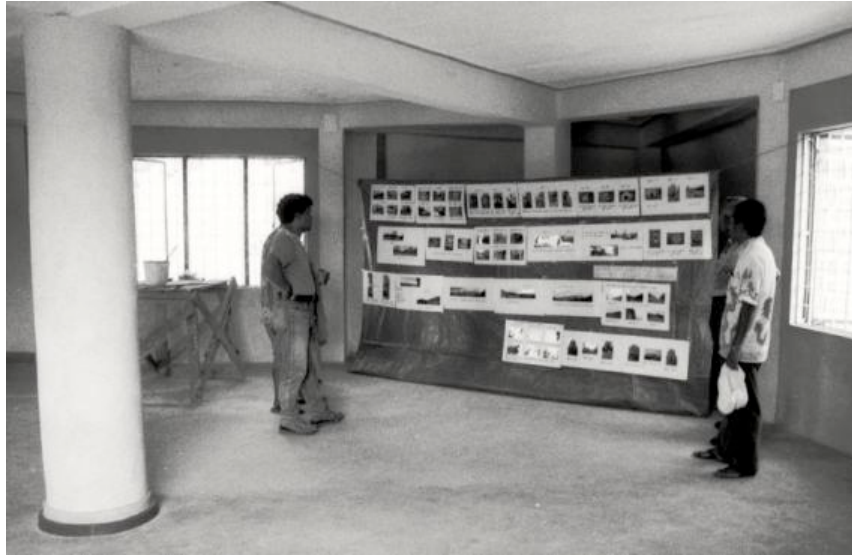
<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712362>

Building of the Khoimbo – 1993



Visit to the Khoimbo in 1994





Visit to the Khoimbo in 1995



Visit to the Khoimbo in 1997





Visit to Khoimbo in 1999



Visit to Khoimbo in 2000



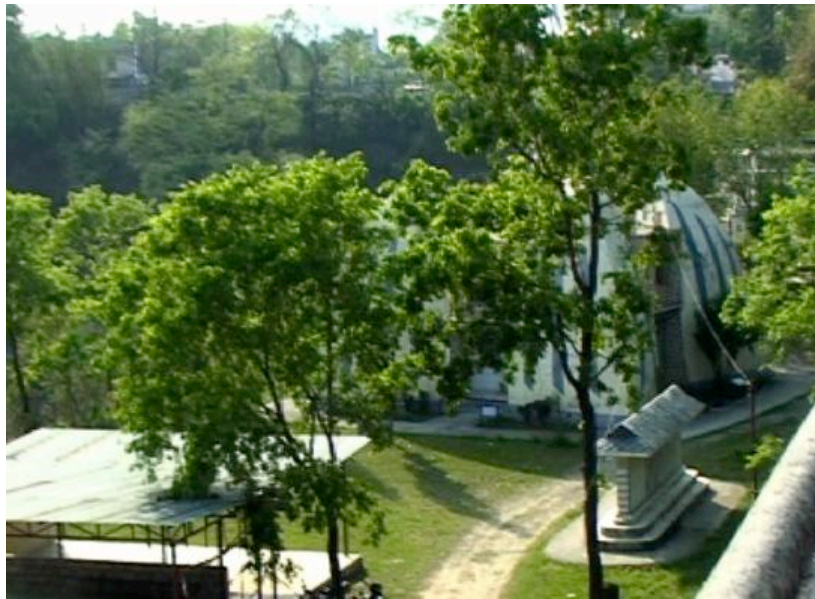
Visit in 2001



Visit in 2006



Visit in 2008



Visit to the Khoimbo in 2010



Visit to the Khoimbo in 2014



FILMS OF VISITS TO KHOIMBO 1995-2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757049>

ELSEWHERE IN NEPAL

The main concentration of Gurungs from Thak outside the village is in Pokhara. But there are others in towns and villages all over the country.

Because of the Gurkha connection there was, for much of the last quarter of the twentieth century, a strong link between the Gurungs and the British funded Lumle Agricultural Centre to the west of Pokhara. This ran courses for retired Gurkhas and set up projects in a few test villages. After the accidental introduction of sheep disease from New Zealand, it also ran a series of campaigns to eradicate the disease in the flocks of the higher Gurung villages. We went on one of these expeditions with a group of Gurungs several of them from Thak.

A group of Gurungs and others on an expedition to attempt to eradicate disease in the Gurung sheep flocks.



We visited Lumle on several occasions and there met a family with whom we would be very close over the following years. Here is a little film of two of our visits.

Two visits to Lumle Agricultural Centre



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1751202>

A number of Gurungs from Thak also went to Kathmandu, although the flow seems to have ceased or reversed in the last years. The Gurung family we know best were not from Thak, but a short visit to their home gave an indication of the life style of a successful Gurung couple who started work at Lumle and then through work for the United Nations and in teaching, have bought a house on the edge of Kathmandu and educated their children at good schools.



A Gurung Migrant Worker in India

From my earliest visit, in 1969-70, I had noted that a number of villagers were going abroad as migrant labourers. The earliest wave tended to go to India, or to the army. Later there were many other destinations.

If they return to the village those who have been working abroad often speak very little about their experience, or tend to make it sound exciting and glamorous. The reality is usually very different and there is a great deal of exploitation and loneliness.

Let me give just one insight into this process, which we gained from a visit to one of my closest friends from my first visit to Thak, Comal Gurung.

When I first went to Thak, Comal was aged twelve. The son of one of the richest and most senior Gurungs in the village, he was unusually lively and helpful and he became one of my three closest informants. He collected data each day on household activities and diet and we became very close friends. I travelled to other villages with him and he was a regular attender at our evening Horlicks and guitar sessions. Here is a rather hazy photo taken from the school photo of 1969.



His house, in the centre of the wealthiest terrace in Thak, built in 1933, was as it appears in this later photo of 1987.



The census record for his family reads as follows: Comal's father, Debiprasad, born 1933, his mother Durgalachmi, born 1934, and several brothers and sisters. Comal was born in 1956, and went to Bombay in 1980. He was married to Mankumari. In 1990 he was a security guard at a bank. In 1994 he was still in Bombay and had 5 children, the youngest three.

*

When I returned to Thak in 1986, I learnt that Comal had gone to work in a town called Dombvili, not far from Bombay. I heard later that he was a security guard at ABC chemicals. He seldom came back to Thak. I obtained his address and wrote to him once or twice and when we found in 1997 that we were going via Bombay on our way to see family in Australia, and could stop for a couple of days, we decided to try to see him. We gathered that he was, in fact, one of several Gurungs from Thak who were working in the same area, a minor form of chain migration.

So in March 1997 we travelled by taxi from Bombay to a suburb called Dombvili. There I met Comal again, now aged 41.



Here is a film of our visit, when we stayed one night with Comal and visited the local town with him.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712267>

On our 2006 visit to Thak we learnt that the factory where Comal and the others worked was closed, and Comal was doing odd jobs as a watchman. His wife is a laundress as were two of his daughters, but his eldest son is at university.

In April 2008 Comal and all his family came back to Thak for his father's memorial ritual or 'chempar'. It was an emotional reunion, some forty years after our first meeting.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712446>

We noted in our diary: 'After the speeches, most went back to Pokhara but some stayed, including Comal and his wife. I asked him if he would come back to Thak. This is a possibility once he retires. All feeling rather exhausted after a long day but the four of us ate together in our house and there was a lot of cheerful joking.'

Yet, when we returned to Thak in 2014, I found the ultimate irony. Arguably the richest and most important Gurung family in Thak had sold their house to a village Tailor.

We noted in our diary: 'So far, no one is selling. It is the same with Kwonme houses. Only Comal has succumbed and his life will be spent in India so he needs money from Thak and not status, or potential access from Pokhara. So, the Gurungs could return here, but it seems unlikely except for short holidays.'

Gurungs in Hong Kong

A number of Gurungs live and work in Hong Kong. We visited a few of them in November 2005. As with the visit to Dombvili, this visit was made special because I re-met one of my two closest childhood informants and friends from 1969, Servajid Gurung, who was fourteen when I first met him in the village in 1968. He was an intelligent and obliging young boy and we spent many evenings with him, and several meals with his family. Servajid, like Comal, undertook a daily meal survey of his family, and I gleaned a good deal of general information from him. We were very fond of him.

On one occasion (14 January 1970) when we went for a meal at his house, we took the following photo of the members of the family present in Thak at that point. In the group are Krishnabadur with his wife Jagatmukari with daughter Indrakumari on her lap, Gokumari and Servajid. Servajid's older brother Sherbahadur, who worked as a migrant worker in Malaysia for some years, is absent.



When we met Servajid again in 2005, he was working for the Kadoori farms.



With him was a group of other Gurungs we had known, especially Premjaji Gurung, who had been one of our most valuable research assistants in the 1990's.



We visited the Kadoori farms with them.



And celebrated at a local restaurant together.



Film of parts of the visit gives a tiny glimpse of an entirely different way of life from the village.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1712340>

Gurungs in the United Kingdom

During the 1960's and 1970's the main destination for those from Thak who wanted to earn money abroad outside the army was India. But later they went to further destinations and there are now large numbers of Gurungs all over the world. Perhaps a quarter of all Gurungs are outside Nepal.

A particular concentration is in the U.K. This is because of the Gurkha connection. Originally there were a few Gurungs, but changes in immigration rules which gave settlement rights to all those had served for a length of time in the British Gurkhas and their dependents, has meant that the number of Gurungs in the U.K. has risen dramatically. There are well over fifty thousand Nepali-born people in the U.K. and one might estimate that well over half of these will be from the Tibeto-Burman groups who were recruited into the Gurkhas.

These overseas Gurungs, to judge from those we know and from the external appearances – cars, clothes, jewellery – of those we meet at Gurung cultural events have been doing well in the U.K.

The Gurungs in the U.K. keep in touch with their families and friends in Nepal through mobile phones and electronic media. As in Pokhara and Nepal, they maintain close links and knowledge of their Nepali friends and family and co-villagers living in the U.K. Several ways in which this is visibly done may be mentioned.

A number of villages have set up associations which run events to raise awareness and to gather money for charitable work in their home villages. For example, the village of Tonting which is to the north of Thak has several galas and events a year and sends money back for medical and other work.

Certain clan groups have also annual or twice yearly meetings. For example, as in Pokhara, we have been invited to meetings of the Kebje clan for picnics and BBQs and other events.

When there are weddings or other celebrations, large numbers of Gurungs may be invited. For instance, we went to one of a wealthy Gurung where there were hundreds of smartly dressed Gurungs with their bejeweled wives and daughters and smart cars.

Most dramatically, twice a year there are very large gatherings of several thousand Gurungs. There are two of these bi-annual

meetings in different parts of the country. They are organized by a very active branch of the T.P.L.S. whose main centre was founded, as described in the last chapter. The T.P.L.S. branch in the U.K. has a website which has much information about current events, branches, contacts and rituals as follows.

Tamu PyeLhu Sangh
To Preserve & Promote Heritage Cultures & Religion of Tamu (Gurung)

HOME | ABOUT US | विषय | BRANCHES | PHOTOS & VIDEOS | CONTACTS | TAMU PRAYER | FACEBOOK | YOUTUBE

YOU ARE HERE: HOME

तमु ज्ये ल्हु संघले गर्यो भव्य समर कार्यक्रम 2014
१४ जुन, कार्तिके। तमु ज्ये ल्हु संघ दुकेने मझ बर्सेको जग्गे बर्सेक भेटघाट तथा समर भिक्तिनु कार्यक्रम विभिन्न कार्यक्रमहरु सहित भव्य रूपले बुनधामसेन सम्पन्न गरेकोछ। अनुपम कोठी रोधनिश स्पोर्ट्स क्लब...

पूर्वमन्त्री बेध गुरुङ्गलाई बेलायतमा सम्मान
१ जुन, असारपौटे। तमु ज्ये ल्हु संघ दुकेको विशेष आयोजनामा पूर्वपूर्व रणनीति विकास र कलुन तथा ग्यास मन्त्री बेध गुरुङ्गलाई सम्मान...

विभिन्न निर्वाह गर्यो तमु ज्ये ल्हु संघ युवाको बैठक सम्पन्न
तमु ज्ये ल्हु संघ युवाको शुक्रवार बसेको बैठकले विभिन्न निर्वाह गर्यो सम्पन्न भएको छ। थाकने तमु ज्ये ल्हु संघको ऐतिहासिक घाते बढेमा सोच...

Ghalek Film Show in UK trailers

Date will be published here once confirmed. Alternatively, please contact the Film Show Area Co-ordinator for further details.

Date	Area	Contact
23 Aug	Nuneaton	Rup Tu 07825 239244/07825 239244
18c	Hounslow	Chandra Yoja 07578 755133
18c	Plumbstead	Nar Tu 07859 990499 07859 990499
18c	Wimbish	Surya Thimche 07886 333549 07886 333549
18c	Wembley	As Bdr Kromchhai 07583 030659 07583 030659
18c	Dover	Netra Tu 07727 692139 07727 692139
		Khem Tamu

We have been to a number of these events and watch them grow ever larger and more elaborate. They combine social events – eating and dancing – with a strong emphasis on the ritual traditions of the ancient religion. The poju and klehbris conduct rituals and ritual dances and bless those who attend.

The event we went to in December 2007 in Reading, for example, had roughly three thousand Gurungs attending. This is an extraordinary number, particularly as there was an even bigger event on the same evening in Kent.

The flavour of one such event can be seen from some films of that held at the Gurung New Year (around December 31st) in 2006.

The event centres on eating (and for the men drinking) together and much chat, photography and gossip. This goes on alongside several hours of presentation of prizes to young Gurungs who have passed various exams, or older Gurungs who have given significant gifts to the Gurung organization, and a welcome from the Lord Mayor and other British connections such as myself.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757138>

Later in the evening there is also a cultural program, mainly consisting of dances by young people. Many of them have been practicing variants of that mixture of Gurung and Nepali dancing which is also popular in the villages. (Notice the backdrop of the Gurung cultural centre in Pokhara.)



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757122>

Early in the proceedings the poju priests start their long rituals, culminating in the blessing of those who attend.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757106>

The other Gurung priests, the Klehbri also do one of their characteristic rituals, but only as a staged performance.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757130>

The two sets of priests also dance together, as they sometimes do in the memorial service or pwe lava in the village.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757114>

Thus the younger generation, many of whom (particularly girls) wear Gurung costume for the occasion, are reminded of a tradition which they have perhaps never witnessed in Nepal. .

Interviews

Another way to see the interplay between the individual and society is to listen to life histories. This was the basis for the volume on 'Dilmaya's world', which examines one Gurung woman's life. Other less detailed accounts can be found in various interviews with Gurungs and a retired soldier who worked with them.

These accounts also fill in part of the otherwise largely missing dimension of the importance of army service in the generations of Gurungs up to the 1970's. Two of the interviews are of retired Gurung officers, and one of a Gurkha recruiting officer.

The rapidly transforming world of young Gurungs who have grown up after the main days of Gurkha recruitment are represented by one young man and one young woman. All four of the Gurungs whose interviews are placed here are relatives of Alan through the kebje lineage into which he was adopted by Lt. Bhuwansing.

Lt. Bhuwansing Gurung



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757264>

Lt. Indrabahadur Gurung

Interviews in April 2009



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757277>



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757286>

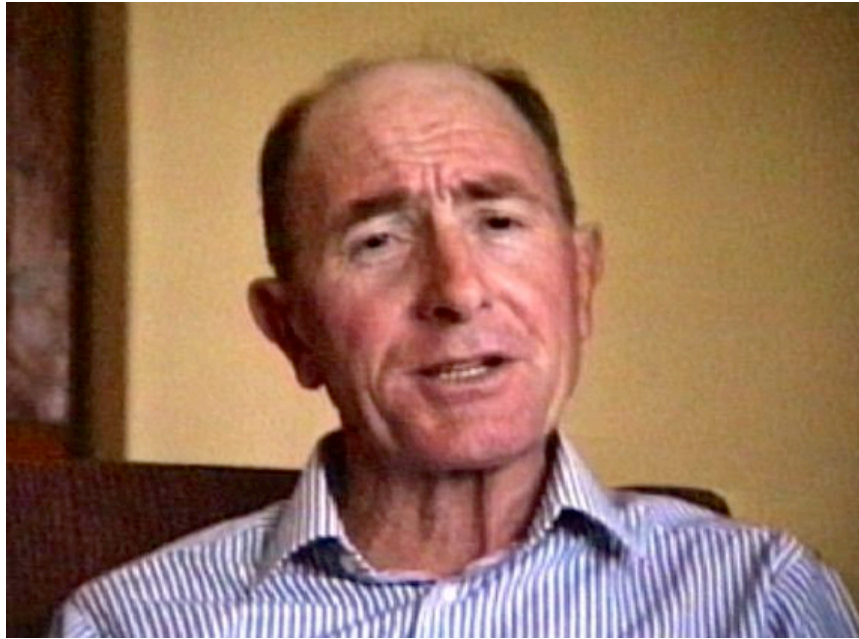
Interview with Bikash Gurung 2008



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757312>

Interviewed on 20th October 2008, when Bikas was aged 30. He is sitting below the village of Thak, with the backdrop of the Annapurna Himalayas. Bikas is the youngest son of Alan's deceased 'sister' Dilmaya Gurung. We have worked with him for many years on the history and culture of the Gurungs.

Interview with Colonel John Cross



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1757294>

We had known John Cross for several years by the time of this interview. His impressive linguistic ability, the fact that he had commanded Gurkha troops in several parts of the world and acted for some years as a recruiting officer for the British Gurkhas, his wide travels through Nepal and various books on the history of that country, and the fact that he has retired to live in Pokhara with his adopted Gurung son puts him in a unique position to comment on the Gurungs in a wider context.

THE SPIRITUAL WORLD OF THE GURUNGS



Introduction

In terms of ritual and religion, the Gurungs combine a down to earth and practical everyday life with a rich cosmology inhabited by a myriad of good and evil spirits which have to be placated. Gurungs present a fine example of the mixing of religious traditions, Buddhist, Hindu and Animist. The Hindu pantheon is worshipped at the Nepali festivals such as Holi and Dasain, as well as in private pujas such as the 'snake puja' and the 'eighty-fourth birthday puja'. Lamas do Buddhist rituals as appropriate, including, for some, the Buddhist funeral rite. The further north one goes through Gurung territory, the more likely are the people to use lamas.

However, praying to the major gods of the great literate traditions only calls on some of the spiritual energy of these people. Every Gurung village is surrounded by a multitude of smaller 'godlings'. Most of them are named after, and reside in, some notable local feature, such as a large rock, a cave, a spring or a tree. Sometimes a small temple is made to these godlings, sometimes there is only a stone placed for their shrine. Once or twice a year the villagers will go up to the shrine and make offerings - rice, flowers and leaves, or a chicken or goat, depending on the godling's preference. An individual may make offerings at these shrines on his own initiative, to encourage fertility, to cure disease or bring a blessing on his family. If neglected or affronted, it is believed that these little godlings can make people ill or destroy their animals or crops. They are not, however, intrinsically malevolent.

The evil spirits are of three kinds. Firstly, there are equivalents of the godlings, called "bhuts" and "prets" which also live in the rocks and forests and prey on the unsuspecting. Secondly there are spirits of certain dead people who have died accidental deaths and were never given a funeral, who still wander round malevolently, not having been safely conducted to the land of the dead. Finally, there are witches.

Until fairly recently in any Gurung village at any time there might have been a dozen or more suspected witches, usually older women with powerful characters. It is not safe to be rude to such people or to refuse them small favours, so too much contact with

them is avoided. They are unlikely ever to be openly accused or molested. In the past, some were driven out of the village, but it is now illegal to call a person a witch. A visitor will find it difficult to get any information about witches for it is considered dangerous even to mention one's suspicions about them, not because of fear of the law, but because of fear of the witch. At night, they were thought to prowl around the village, wearing a sort of metal armour under their ordinary clothes, their eyes red, and fire coming out of their finger-tips. They were believed to cause much of the misery in the village.

The main task of the local priests is to fight these different kinds of evil spirits through their rituals. There is no point in placating witches; they must be trapped by food offerings and then expelled. But suffering never ceases and the forces of evil are never fully controlled. Belief in these causes of illness, sudden death, landslides and so on, does not prevent people from taking other, more practical action against various afflictions. Just as the Gurungs can combine different religious traditions, so it has been easy for them to accommodate western and eastern theories of causation, to go to the hospital and to use western drugs, at the same time consulting their priests and doing rituals against evil spirits.

*

We can look at Gurung spiritual life as composed of layers, and it is through these layers that we will try to take the reader down into the heart of Gurung beliefs and rituals.

On the surface are family and community rituals which are heavily influenced by Hinduism, in other words they have developed over the last three or four hundred years as the Gurungs moved down from the higher Himalayas and came into contact with the Hindu civilizations to the south. This affects their village rituals.

It has also affected their life cycle rituals, weddings and funerals, though these are, like the village rituals, still a considerable mixture of pre-Hindu and current practices. It has also affected their sacred dances, which are a mixture of Hindu and more ancient Gurung traditions.

All of the above is relatively recent, some hundreds of years old. Below it are two further elements. One is the effect of the movement of at least some of the Gurung clans through Tibet

over the last two thousand years. This has brought them into contact with Buddhism and with the pre-Buddhist bon religion of Tibet. So the Gurungs use Lamas and also have *klehbri* priests, as they are called, who are principally important in the death rituals.

Most deeply buried are the remains of an ancient shamanic tradition which is believed to trace back to northern China. It is thousands of years old and is preserved in the *pachhyu* or *pachyu* priest and his myths and rituals. Five examples of these complex rituals are included in some detail.

The final one of these, the memorial ritual or 'pae', which takes the spirit of the dead person back to the land of the dead, is the most complex and encompasses much of the work of both the *pachhyu* and the *klehbri* and ends our account.

A reader is thus travelling down a tunnel of time, passing from the recent centuries and re-tracing the movements of this people as they wandered over many thousands of years and miles. Few people now know this story and it seems important to preserve the documentation, often best done in film, both for those outsiders interested in the varieties of religious experience, and, above all, for the people who have so generously shared their life with us.

Family and Community Rituals

Introduction

The anthropologist Bernard Pignède, who worked in the village of Mohoriya north west of Pokhara in the late 1950's and wrote the first and classic account of the Gurungs, described their main festivals thus. (*The Gurungs*, pp. 319ff)

A. - FAMILY FESTIVALS.

‘They are almost all borrowed from the Nepalo-Indian calendar and celebrated throughout Nepal. The local pachyu and klehbri priests have nothing to do with them. Each family does the rites which correspond to the festival in his own house. Sometimes the whole village gets together to mark the festival by dancing and playing games.

Before describing these festivals, it is necessary to say that the ritual done by the Gurungs has, most often, only a very remote connection with the traditional ritual which is observed in the Hindu areas of Nepal or in India. The Gurungs usually do not know the meaning of these festivals and more or less imitate what they have seen done elsewhere. The rites celebrated vary from one village to another, and from one household to another. Sometimes even, the ritual is purely Gurung; only the name of the festival and its date are borrowed from the Hindu tradition. The brief description of these borrowed festivals which I will give will not be compared in detail with those of the corresponding Hindu festivals¹:

*Sankranti*¹ takes place on the first day of Srawan (in 1958, the 17th July). The evening before, the evil spirit (?) *Sankranti* comes to the village bringing sickness. Very often, the villagers work the following day in the fields as in July agricultural operations cannot wait.

Firstly the edges of the courtyard are purified with cow's dung and then nine different kinds of bers are collected and tied together,

along with maize and seasonal fruits. Nine bundles of mhyodo/mah (dry mountain bamboo) are brought in alight inside the house.

After the sacrifice of a cock, all the family bring burning firewood from inside the house and circle round their heads saying “kra naba – pho naba – pahli naba – yo naba, rog – byad taan boi hyado A-ghi sankrait” (all types of illness and sickness in the village are taken out by brother sankrati). Then they throw the fire wood below the house.

- *Dasarah* is the big Nepalo-Indian festival which takes place in Asoj/Katik. It is celebrated both individually and collectively. Agricultural work is suspended for four days. Ten days previously some grains of barley are planted inside the house in a little earth. The young seedlings are worn behind the ear and in the hair during the festival. The house is cleaned from top to bottom. A *tika* of rice and seven different colours is put on the forehead by the head of the family. Then the young people go and visit older people and pay their respects. The latter, in return, give them their blessing. On the morning of the third day, one sacrifices goats, sheep and chickens. The blood is sprinkled over the tools and utensils which are used to cut, dig, and kill (*bhandpija*). In the evening, one dances and sings on the terrace of the kroh's house. On the same day, a buffalo bought by the villagers is sacrificed in front of the altar of these two villages. At *Dasarah*, a long dance of a very original character is done. It is called *mahda* (or *sorati*, nep.) and is danced during six days in front of the kroh's house. Two young men dress up in women's clothes. Two others in male costume are their partners. A huge circle is formed round them. A narrator starts to sing a long story which gives the theme of the dance, and in which each phrase is repeated by the audience. The songs are accompanied by the *madal* (small drum), and the *mohjar* (small cymbal) and the clapping of hands by the audience. [For further description see under ‘Krishna Charitra’ in ‘Six Sacred Dances’]

- *Tihar*: takes place in the month of Katik (October-November) for three days. This festival is also celebrated individually and collectively. Sisters put a *tika* of rice and *dhai* (yoghurt) on their brothers' foreheads and brothers give presents to their sisters (money, bracelets, etc.). The whole village enjoys all sorts of games, especially card games. They also organise competitions of skill, and of athleticism (running, throwing the weight etc.).

- *Gainu*: is celebrated in Mangsir (November-December), the night of the first full moon. It is the festival of the animals, and especially of the temporary cow-sheds where the cows and oxen live outside the village. A cock is sacrificed on a small stone altar, set up beside the shed, to satisfy the spirit protector of the animals.

- *Puspandra*: in the evening of the 15th of the month of *Pus* (December-January), the villagers eat rather better than usual.

- *Maghe Sankranti*: (Maha Sankranti in India): takes place on a first day of the Nepali month of Mahg. On this day all people eat Chuyra (beaten rice), honey, Teme and masa-tah/dal (lentil sauce). Especially people give rice, salt, chilly, lentils, ghee and teme to married daughters.

- *Phagu Purnima*: (the Indian festival of Holi): takes place in the month of Phagu (February-March), on the day of the full moon. Children throw red powder in people's faces, but the work in the fields is not interrupted.

- *Chait Dashain*: begins on the 1st of the month of Chait (March-April). A buffalo is sacrificed at the *ko*. The *kroh* grants a day of rest on this occasion.

Informants in Thak told Alan Macfarlane as follows:

The village is still doing the four general rituals: Buje Deurali (goat sacrifice); Mai Pulo ('barelai kew' - Siklis sheep - and doves); Bhayer (below House37 - 'shill kew' - Arabian sheep); Debi Kot (Kwi nasa - buffalo).

The various village godlings - Mae Pullo, Deorali, Debi, etc. are Hindu godlings - everyone, including Tailors and Blacksmiths worship. Sildu. Each village has its own set of minor godlings.

Learnt that the four shrines in order of importance, with their gods are: Mai Pulo - Barra; Buje Deurali; Baiar - Baiar; Debi - Debi. Talked about why these were important. They are shrines for everybody - Songi, Kugi, Tailors, Blacksmiths, Brahmins, etc.

*

One description of the festivals and rituals seen from the village level is as follows. It comes from an interview of the late Dilmaya Gurung by Alan Macfarlane in 1992.

There are two Dashain festivals. One Dashain is in *Chaitra* (mid-March-mid April). In the Chaite Dashain people eat goat, if there are no goats they eat chicken, buffalo and a large doughnut ring, made of rice flour, (*selroti*) are eaten. Buffalo is also sacrificed in the shrine *Kot*. People do not work for two days in Chaite Dashain of which one day is spent for worshipping (*puja*). At least people do not work for one day. This is all about Chaite Dashain.

Another Dashain is in the month of Asoj (mid-September to October). This Dashain is known as Thulo (big) Dashain. This is difficult to manage. In this Dashain people clean and plaster their houses with soil brought from the forest.

On the day of the new moon, all people in the village start to plaster their house with clay. Some sow mixed seeds of barley maize on this day and this is called Jamara. To prepare Jamara, a medium is prepared by mixing soil and manure. Then Jamara is sown in the soil. On the seventh day of the new moon people do not do anything. On the ninth day people offer a number of buffaloes and goats to the goddess. But I sacrifice sheep. The price of sheep is about rupees 1,000-1,200. On the tenth day, people go to get a *Tika* from elderly people such as their father, mother, grandfather and relatives. Then they eat meat and rice and enjoy themselves. Several people drink alcohol and get drunk. Fathers (and mothers) and brothers and their family invite their married away sisters and daughters from other villages and provide good food including rice, meat and other things. This is all about Big Dashain.

After Dashain another festival called Tihar comes usually in Kartik (some time in October). In this festival, the sisters worship brothers and put *tika* on their forehead. This is called *Bhai tika*. On the new moon day, protection marks for their brothers are prepared out of oil on the threshold. On the same day, people make many large doughnut rings and alcohol. The sisters prepare the large doughnut rings and alcohol and go to different villages and others come to visit their brothers. Some brothers give

clothes while some give money to their sisters. On the day of *tika*, sisters visit their brothers' home, put tika and stay there with enjoyment and eat roti and raksi. Some people use the meat which they have left over from Dasain, if they don't have enough meat they kill chicken, buffalo and goat. The sisters put tika on their brothers' forehead on the day of Tika. Rich brothers give more money, those who are not rich give one shawl or one lungi (long skirt).

In Dasain and Tihar people have fun. In Tihar the brothers who do not have sisters cry and the sisters who do not have brothers cry as well. In this situation they feel sad, unhappy. This festival is very important for brothers and sisters. My brother is in another country and I feel sad. My other brother is not here. Will you please come next year? Then we will celebrate Dasain and Tihar with joy. I will be very happy if you come here next year. Prem Kumari will put a Tika on her brother's forehead. (Krishna, Tsrna and Om) and I will put one on for you two. We will celebrate this festival with all the members of our family.

Dasain Festivals

Blessing the animals at Diwali – 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647178>

Part of the Dasain festival, the family bless the larger animals

Family ritual at Dasain – 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647226>

Alan, Sarah and others put rice on the foreheads of members of the family.

Other rituals

Gairu Puja – 2006



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647258>

Another performance of the puja, done by Surjebahadur and others, to protect the animals. Done for house 24, the house above.

Bhayer Puja at Buje Deurali 12 May 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647344>

Went down to Buje Deurali after 'prokeh' to watch the first stage of the puja, called Bhayer puja, done, as far as I can gather, for the well-being of the village. Much as we've seen before when Surje used to do it. Four goats in all were brought up to Buje Deurali, and chicken to the other shrines.

Film

Premkumari climbing into a tree at Buje Deurali
Bombahadur pouring oil into little lamps in shrine
Old woman, Debikumari, untangling string with mountains behind
Bimbahadur grinding a white substance on a stone
Bombahadur putting dung by a small triangular shrine. Yangjakot ridge opposite
Boy holds goat while Bombahadur washes its hind legs, then its head and back and takes it into shrine

At another shrine:

Bombahadur and Potamkumari putting offerings at small shrine under a tree
Potamkumari prays and leaves sticks of incense under tree.
Bombahadur chanting over offerings.
Preparing the cock for sacrifice by sprinkling water on it.
Bombahadur beheads chicken with sickle and sprinkles its blood under tree. Head of another cock already left as offering.
Bombahadur preparing another large cock to sacrifice for Potamkumari
Bimbahadur builds fire to burn feathers off cock
Mansing waiting with cock for sacrifice
Village, fields, to Buje Deurali temple and smoke in distance
Bombahadur lights oil lamp in shrine
Koshi outside shrine, man standing with sacrificial chicken

Buje Deurali Puja 18 November 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647312>

Notes

I went down to a small puja at the Buje Deurali shrine. A beautiful day with the mountains glorious behind. I filmed Premkumari and Nirmala going down and then bits of the ritual done by Bombahadur.

Only about ten people from the village sent contributions, despite the cries of the Kcadwala. The ritual was similar to previous ones - cooking unhusked rice and cow's milk, small offerings of flowers, cloth, a few rupees, 'dhup', manure, etc.

The most interesting difference was the use of a 'lobu' (radish) instead of a goat. It was given four legs and sacrificed in the same way as a goat. Reminded me of the sacrifice of a cucumber instead of a cow among the north African Nuer.

Harimaya brought some 'pa' to save Dilmaya having to make yet more. Our presence means she had to make it every few days as they only get about 3 bottles from each boiling. Alan asked why she had done nothing about the 'lobu' puja at Buje Deurali. She said she was too busy, and anyway Buje Deurali was only a stone and can't do anything, but Dilmaya thought that if they didn't placate her then it would hail etc.

Last night the 'pujari', Bombahadur, called Buje Deurali to the stone near House9 three times and warned her that they would be doing the puja the next day - called 'Nimdulava'. He asked her to protect the village from hail, to keep the fields safe and the animals. Buje Deurali has no husband, but many children. The shrine below is her eldest son. All the other children are in the shrine.

Nine Deer Ritual – 7 April 1991

Namru Tiba (also 'Nabri puja') ritual for the ninth deer killed by Budibahadur



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641064>

Notes

Immediately after 'prokeihn' we went up to Budibahadur's where a crowd was gathering prior to the puja on the killing of the ninth deer by Budibahadur. This is done to appease the gods of the forest for taking one of its animals.

Came to a spot beyond the Sarki village after guns having been fired off in the village at the start of the procession. Our Kancha as 'pujari' is officiating. A space on the side of the hill in a cleft of rock is cleared first. The deer is laid out on bracken on the path. All admire - check the shots that killed it. Each household sends only one representative to feast off the deer. The puja is for propitiating the god Nabrile. This is the Nabri puja. If you kill nine tigers you do the same puja.

They cut a length of bramble from below. This is clearly important. They took off a few leaves then cut it into a stick and

stuck it beside the deer. Bamboo is also cut and a banana tree leaf. Kancha requires the usual offering of rice, corn, (dung) and cow's milk. Tailor pares off a little from each hoof, each ear, top of nose, piece of cheek, muntjak tooth - Motilal (Tailor) holds pieces. Each person contributes money - Durgabhadur collects. Tailors and Blacksmiths much in evidence at skinning. Tailors do it. Quite careful skinning unlike goats which they burn to singe the fur off. Budibahadur's father supervises the taking of samples of flesh and bone, and the skinning.

Kancha doing the usual. Four bamboos make shrine with cotton round. Bamboo is sticking up on edge. He makes images of two little gods out of dung. Kancha asked that I don't go there as women not allowed there. Another group are drawing targets on the skin of bamboo. A Tailor is sent off to set it up above the path near the shrine on two bamboo sticks. I fear they might fire from just below my perch above the deer. The Tailors show a certain knowledge of anatomy, knowing which part of stomach to cut first. The Tailor cuts the liver out and examines it briefly.

I notice the 'chievemae' coming down now - Ramchandra, Agi Kroh, Bolbahadur - I note that I am the only woman here. The heart is cut out and put in a cup with the other pieces of bone etc. and taking off to the shrine. 'Chievemae' sitting on a 'gundri' together, shoes off. The guns are ancient muzzle loaders. That Budibahadur has killed nine deer might suggest that deer are becoming more plentiful. Alan thinks that now the ex-Gurkhas have gone with their expensive guns, the deer will multiply. Only Budibahadur hunts now. The last time this rite was done is now many years ago.

Men go off to do puja with Kancha. Bring heart back. Put a few leaves of bracken in the deer's mouth. Feed the dogs with a little of the meet and blood. Cut the carcass from the head. The skin and head remain intact. Motilal takes off stomach and intestines to clean out. Carcass then cut into pieces and the rib cage broken. The liver and kidneys are cut into small pieces, and the heart. Budibahadur and his father split bamboo. A cock has been sacrificed by the 'pujari' and taken off to the fire. The head and skin of the deer taken off to the shrine. A leg is hung on the bramble stake.

Parsing tried to shoot the target but the gun misfired. Actual reciting at the shrine was done by Tekansing and the younger Gomansing. Skin and head brought back, and it and the one leg

are packed away in a sack. The rice is cooked in large copper pan. They brought up 'ghee , khursani', curry powder, salt, pepper and onions. A radio is giving the news. They are singularly uninterested - never can tell us what is happening in the world, but one sees that here it is irrelevant. Here we are perched on a path overlooking the valley to Pokhara, sun shining warmly, a million miles from anywhere.

Durgabhadur is cooking - cutting onion to go with the meat. The good meat is put in one pot, not so good in another. Budibahadur told them not to put too much 'khursani' in that one as we wouldn't like it! Yet another pot was set up and the worst meat - the stomach, etc. - cooked in that. Noted Durgabhadur shooing off flies and covering the dish against flies. Again, the dogs are given blood. All the dishes and spoons for stirring are carefully washed, over and over again. So are their hands.

The Gurungs seat themselves on the higher path. First a 'prasad' of best deer meat given - about 9 pieces. The Tailors, Blacksmiths and Leather workers (Sarki) sit on a terrace below. Then 'prasad' of chicken. Last time Surje saw this done was 40 years ago by old Manseram. With the 'prasad' is 'pa'. Durgabhadur complained it had been watered down. As both Alan and I drank a little, I hope not. When water ran out they sent a boy for more beyond this site, but it was pretty filthy. They had to go to the spring behind to get any cleanish water. Good to see that most people wash up their own dishes.

Film

Man loading a gun
Inspecting the shot deer
People leaving for the ritual
Motilal carrying the deer
Hunting dogs wearing bells
Terraces beyond the Sarki houses with men gathering for the ritual
Men gathering and cutting wood for fire
Deer lain on pile of bracken
Gun fired
Men with rice for feast
Budibahadur cutting a stake which he puts in the ground beside the deer
Kumansing sharpening a 'khukri'
Surje, as 'pujari', with a banana leaf goes off to perform ritual

Surje preparing the shrine with leaves, buffalo dung, and money and
parts of the deer
helped by Gomansing
Men skinning the deer
Goprasad drawing a target
Setting up the target
Surje making an offering of rice to the shrine
Gomansing bringing an offering of deer meat
Surje preparing to sacrifice a cock
Tekansing doing a ritual chant while Surje prepares the cock
pouring water on it
Surje sacrifices the cock and sprinkles its blood over the shrine then puts
a few feathers in the lumps of dung
Budibahadur loading a gun target in the distance
Ramchandra examining the liver with Tekansing
Hunting dogs being fed blood by Budibahadur
Karbir, Budibahadur's father telling hunting stories
Tailors and Blacksmiths eating separately
Women on the path beyond, watching
Men preparing to leave

Durga puja 1993



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2573612>

Chaita Dashain. Awoke early with a buzz of sound. Tailors at some time beating drum. They celebrate the Durga festival for ten days now. It is their job to go in search of a buffalo to sacrifice at the Kot...

Have just witnessed the sacrifice at the Kot. The buffalo only tiny, but cost 1,000rs. even so. The Tailors had one large conical drum and the curling horn. People brought the usual dishes of rice, and the stake in the Kot was decorated with a red flower at the top. On the ground, on a narrow pile of earth, was the killing khukuri, also decorated with chalk designs and leaves. A group of men chanted the "Durga puja" from a book. On the second chanting, Tikaram brought up the buffalo to outside the Kot, where the pujari washed its feet. Inside the Kot, the pujari sprinkled it with water and daubed red powder only its head and back. He also lit little strings which he laid across its spine. The

buffalo didn't flinch. Then Nandalal laid a stick in place of the 'khukri' and bound the animal lightly with two bamboo strips. The killing was swift. Unfortunately, my film ran out at that moment, but I wasn't going to look anyway. Little boys dipped clumps of the astringent smelling herb (like balsam) into the blood, and ran off with them. Noticed on returning that there was a drip of blood on our step, so each house blessed and involved in the blood sacrifice.

Film

Tailor playing horn. 'Pujari' preparing 'kot' while people wait
Women emptying dishes of rice offerings
Jusbir, the 'katwalla', calling people
'Pujari' preparing 'kot'
Pan up to village. 'Pujari' putting a joss stick in front of tethering post in 'kot'
'Pujari' praying inside shrine at Devi Than
Odansing drumming at the 'kot', men chanting
Men chanting led by an old man who is reading the words
Tikaram pulling up the baby buffalo.
Buffalo just outside the 'kot' being "washed" by the 'pujari'
Buffalo being led into the 'kot' where the
'pujari' puts incense on its spine and sprinkles it with more water
Nandalal ties buffalo round with bamboo strips, then it is tied to the post, head down, Nandalal pulling its tail.
'Pujari' preparing to kill then strikes its neck with 'khukri'.
Nandalal smears blood on 'khukri'.
Small boys dip leaves in blood to sprinkle round the village.
Tikaram puts the head of the buffalo on wall of 'kot'.
Tailors' curled horn and drum dipped in blood by Jusbir
Sarah making notes, with Premkumari beside her at the 'kot'
Nandalal and Tikaram dipping leaves in blood at the 'kot'
Men carry the buffalo out of the 'kot', then audience cheer and the ceremony is over

Mandir Blessing 1997



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641096>

Mandir construction Mailo Dada 6 3 1997

Notes

There is also a new 'mandir' at Mailo Dada built by Chandrabahadur (House 106). It is large and well-kept and dedicated to Siva. Mark tried to buy one of his two cockerels, but he said he needed one to sacrifice at the 'mandir' in a few day's hence.

Today is Maha Shiva Ratri and the first puja at the new 'mandir' at Mailo Dada. We went up quite early on. Comalman was the Brahmin presiding outside. I don't know which Brahmin was inside the shrine. The giver of the festival was Chandrabahadur and he sat within the shrine while people put smoking joss sticks, a flower, grains and money in front of the lingam. The 'mandir' was built by Budiman Sarki (Pudke) and cost c. 40,000rs.

Blessing a Mandir Temple on the Taprang Road in 1998



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2562312>

WEDDINGS AND FUNERALS

WEDDINGS

Marriage among the Gurungs has traditionally been too important a matter to leave to the whim of individuals. A marriage affects the social relations not only of the couple themselves, but of all their relatives. The choice of a spouse is thus a family affair. The mother and father, with the assistance of senior relatives, will choose an appropriate bride or groom and then inform the individual. Sometimes the couple have never met before the wedding ceremony. If they cannot get on, they will refuse to cohabit and the marriage will fade away because marriage among the Gurungs is a process rather than a single, irreversible event.

There are two stages in the making of a marriage. In the first, several rituals occur involving visiting between bride and groom's kin. As described to me by Lt. I.B. Gurung, the rituals are as follows.

When the bride is brought to the groom's house, the sisters of the groom bar. The bride's mother hides upstairs. After several requests and knocking the sisters open the door, holding unhusked rice on a *nauli* (a big round tray made of bamboo). The new couple should put gifts (money) on the rice, only after that are they allowed in. The bride and groom are seated side by side and call the mother with, stating that they will continue to love her and never make her sad in the future.

The new couple is purified with milk and local whisky (*raksi*). The bride changes into a new shawl given to her by the groom and covers her head and face. The groom's oldest male relatives continue entertain the guests, who share a meal with their hosts. After three days, the couple go back to the bride's house with *kghe*n (bread) and *Paa* (*raksi*). If the bride's family is away or it is not possible to reach them, the couple can go to any of the bride's lineage living nearby in the village.

After this ceremony, the parents on both sides choose a lucky year and day suggested by the priest and the second ceremony is performed which officially transfers the bride from her lineage to that of her husband. In this ceremony; *roti* (fried bread), *raski* (drink) and yoghurt in a wooden pot are taken to the bride's house by the groom's family. A 'phyo', a big bamboo mat is placed in

the yard of the bride's house. The groom and his relative sit on one side of the mattress and the bride's relatives are on the opposite. Some husked rice is put on the mat and a small light is lit in the middle of the plate. There is an exchange of gifts, and the families talk about their lineage history. Six coin (chha suki) are counted out and given from the groom's side, every coin has its own different meaning. After 'Chha suki' chyoba, the parents of the bride and her father formally give her to her husband's lineage and ask them to give her happiness for her whole life. In some ceremonies, the bride's relatives give some gifts to the bride.

In arranged marriages, the ceremony of lineage transfer is done at once. But in love marriages and other marriages, the ceremony lineage transfer (badad ponba/sardiba) is done at a suitable time, perhaps some years later.

The Nepali Government have introduced the registration of marriage which must be done after the first ceremony. This confirms the marriage at the first stage and is making the second ceremony redundant. As an 'official' marriage is harder to break, young people, particularly in towns where they are more influenced by Western culture, are less ready to have their parents choose a partner for them. 'Love' marriage is becoming more common there, but in the villages the old method of bride selection is still the norm.

Pignède, Gurungs, pp. 242-6

In itself the Gurung wedding has no religious significance. The ceremony is extremely simple. In summary, it marks the beginning of the legitimate conjugal life of a man and a woman, by transforming their single, celibate status to that of a married person. Neither lama, nor *pachyu*, nor *klehbrni* intervenes during the ceremony. Only the brahmin, in rich weddings of a Hindu character, plays some sort of role.

I have never found any reference to a religious rite of marriage in the histories told by the *pachyu*, which on several occasions describe weddings. A man decides to marry a woman. He considers the clan and lineage relations with the latter, and if these permit, he takes her to his home, or to that of his father, without any particular rite being performed. ... Wedding ceremonies usually take place only between mid-October and the beginning of April. No rule forbids them taking place outside this period.

The marriage ceremony nowadays is still very simple. However, in the course of the last centuries, certain rites of a Hindu character have been added. Furthermore, some well-off families call in a Brahmin, and the ceremony then becomes a lot more complicated; I will only describe weddings of the most usual sort.⁵

The bridegroom, accompanied by some young friends or family of his own generation, arrives in his future wife's village on the evening before the wedding or very early the next day; he is led to the house of his future in-laws. Inside the house, the betrothed couple sit down side by side. The girl's father and mother put a little bit of rice mixed with *dhai* or *dahi* (nep., boiled skimmed milk) on the foreheads of the future couple and wish them a happy life. They then wash their daughter's feet and take a drop of the water so used to their lips. Several presents are then offered to the wife by her family. Sometimes, a present given by the parents of the groom may be handed over to the parents of the bride. The marriage ceremony in the bride's village is finished.

A little after the couple, escorted by the friends of the groom who are joined by friends of the bride, leave for the groom's village. In her in-laws house the young bride receives new clothes which she will wear all day. Then, rice mixed with *dahi* is put on the young couple's foreheads by a boy whose father and mother are alive, and by the older members of the village and the groom's' family. When they have finished this gesture, they give the young couple their wishes for their happiness. At night, the young wife sleeps in her in-laws house next to the girlfriends from her village who have come with her. During three days at least, the young couple stay in this house. Then the wife sets out again for her village with her friends and comes back a little later, alone this time, to finally come and live with her husband. . . The rite which takes place in the house of the husband's kin leads us to make several comments. It is not the parents who put rice and *dahi* on the forehead, but the elders of their family, of their local descent group and of other groups of the village. The marriage is therefore sanctioned not by the parents but by the community in which the young couple are going to live. Thus, the publicity necessary for the marriage is assured. The elders accept the couple in the community and give them their blessing that they may live there in peace and happiness.

Before the village elders, a young boy also puts rice and *dahi* on the forehead of each of the spouses and wishes them happiness. This boy still has his father and mother. The happiness which he wishes the

young couple, is that of a son whose parents have had a long life. As far as the Gurungs are concerned, this wish is very understandable since the young couple desire above all things to have a son who will be able to inherit his father's property and assure descendants.

Blacksmith wedding 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641104>

Notes

... we heard the Tailors' band coming from Taprang. Belted up the hill again despite tired legs, and were in time to see the band accompanying the groom and his friends come down to the house. They had to run the gauntlet - a hail of 'toro' stalks, thrown with great vigour by the women and children. On reaching the platform, the band played a tune that sent two men into a tranced dance, then they all sat down and were fed rice beer. I noted some older men going into the house, possibly to greet the bride, but we didn't go in. Chandrabahadur handed out cigarettes to all who smoked from the wedding guests and as they were then to be fed, and the bride doesn't leave till tomorrow, we left. I had the frustration again of the film not catching, and the photos I'd taken of the possessed dancers were lost. Also all but one of the photos at Yarjung's house. I'd forgotten I'd taken photos there and feared that some Mohoriya photos were lost, but luckily we can repeat the pachhyu's photos.

Second day of the wedding festivities. Heard the Tailors' band about 5.30am. Didn't go up until about 11.00am. The bride and groom were sitting together, the bride's head covered so one could only just see her face. Relatives and friends were giving money and washing their feet - the bride's each time, but if related to the groom, both. They seemed to sprinkle their own heads with the dirty water from the feet, and even sup a little. This money-giving went on for a long time, so long that we left at 1.00pm. Before this, we noticed that the band was sleeping, then they were woken and fed rice and buffalo meat.

Heard that the wedding would have cost between 3000-4000rs. - a buffalo, rice, rice beer, for a large number of people. Alan managed to do a lot of good filming. We were told that in all essentials this is the same as a Gurung wedding, except Gurungs gave more food and drank 'pa' rather than rice beer. As they were walking along the path below the platforms, a group of Thak women barred the way, and demanded money to let them pass. A quick whip-round and they gave about 5-10rs. each. This is used by the women to buy cigarettes. When they were satisfied with the amount paid they let them pass.

Film

Crowd above the road waiting for the groom to arrive
Children with pieces of 'toro' stalk to hit the groom and his party with
The groom (wearing turban and sun-glasses) and friends arriving from
Taprang led by Tailor's band
Groom and friends attempting to cover their heads then being beaten
by the young women of the village led by Chokhomaya with whom they
try to negotiate a pass. Finally ,they run past
Men circling the groom with flaming brands while he sits on a man's
shoulders
Kumansing carried round the outside, presumably as the bride's
representative. One man throws rice from a dish as he circles
Kumansing put down and then circles throwing rice from the dish at the
groom
groom put down and old man puts rice on his forehead followed by
other men, including Manseram
Amarsing dancing in possession
Then rhythm changes and then both come out of possession
Blacksmith guests and Gurungs

Nandalal Sarki dancing
Badrasing Kami dancing
Groom sitting with other young men, being entertained
Large copper water container
Chandrabahadur, father of the bride, giving cigarettes to guests
Gurungs as well as Dalits - Chokhomaya takes from his hands and gives them to others
Bopalsing pachhyu
Amarsing filling large copper water pot from 'gowri' that women are bringing up from the tap
Man wearing a 'bakkhu' talking to group of men smoking then takes one of them into the house
Groom sitting with large radio/tape recorder on his lap, playing Nepali songs
Pouring out rice beer for the guests
A guest winding back a tape with a pencil
Bride and groom given 'tika' and money by guests
Guest washing the bride's feet
Tailor's band members eating rice on the verandah
Bride being carried out of her house on Yemprasad's back, crying
Moving up village street accompanied by Tailor's band, groom's party stopped by Thak women who demand payment before allowing them to pass.
Procession leaving the village and young men cheering

Divining a good day for a wedding 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647210>

Parsing Biha Bhater 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641029>

A 'bihar bhatar' or formal ceremony to celebrate a wedding. Parsing and Sashi looked suitably bride and groom like. The form is really to filter back money owed from previous sums paid by the family at weddings. Every sum given with the name of the donor is noted in a large cash book. Surna was helping with this.

Each guest gives a 'tika' to bride and groom, wishes them well and marks his own forehead with cooked rice dyed red, then moves on to give a donation.

FUNERALS AND CREMATIONS

Tanting funeral 1990

Funeral of a young woman who died in childbirth 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2573645>

Notes

Awoke without a cloud in the sky and the mountains magnificent. Heavy falls of snow on all the hilltops. Today the dead girl is to be buried. From our platform, we can see down into the courtyard at the dead woman's parents' house. Men are gathered, including three pachhyus who, at 8.00am, are playing separate rhythms on two drums. We see men from Siklis arrive. Two boys ran over yesterday at 4.30pm. back by 9.00pm. Last night, Durga, his mother and sister went and sat in the house of the dead woman until past midnight.

Many people were there and the balcony was full of people as well as the house. At 10.55am. a bed was brought out of the house, covered with a 'gundri', and stood in the middle of the yard. By now there were many men standing there. At 11.00am. Durga returned to say the Pradhan Panch was in the yard and would like to see us. Also he foresaw no difficulty in us filming the funeral, and as Durga seemed happy with the outcome we decided to try.

When we approached the house, we could hear women wailing inside. The courtyard was full of men. Other women stood outside the wall on the path, looking into the yard. We discussed the lack of any medical or midwifery assistance. Apparently, everyone accepts that this death is due solely to pregnancy complications, and is not caused by a witch or other spirit.

The name of the dead girl is not known to Durga, but everyone knows her as Nani Tzaza. She was the only daughter and has a young brother aged eight. Later we learnt that she is the second wife of a young soldier (28) in the Indian Army. His first wife is with him. They have no children, but will take the baby back with them and bring it up.

The corpse was brought out eventually, after the pachhyu had speared a spirit outside the doorway with a large stick, and fired an arrow from a bow into the air. The body was tiny, wrapped up in a white cloth in a crouching position. Above the head, a crown of leaves was tied representing hair. Beneath the white cloth one could see that the body was dressed in old Gurung costume - the old-style skirt, the 'ngui', and a 'pro'.

Women came from the house wailing, throwing their arms round the corpse, stroking the leaves. They covered it with a purple sari. The klehbri did a slow dance round the bed, then men started to file round, giving a few rupees each which were attached to a tape. This was to buy a 'kramu'.

Two large banners made of torn strips of paper to which cigarettes were attached like crowns were stuck on either side of the corpse. At the corner of the yard stood the 'ala' similar to the one which is put on the house at the 'pae'. The 'ghyan', a long strip of cloth attached to poles was unwound and stood from the house gate down along the path the corpse would follow. Young men, including Durga, carried it. The corpse was lifted on the stretcher onto the shoulders of four men, and the party moved off, led by the 'ghyan'. The stretcher was surrounded by wailing

women all wearing their tartan shawls over their heads. Men followed.

The klehbri walked beside the bier. From time to time a ripple of men yodelling ran along the line, and occasionally the bier was stopped, possibly at significant landmarks en route, and the klehbri chanted beside it and inscribed a circle with his bird. The bier was not lowered. We walked quite some way, crossing a suspension bridge. The path was still wet from yesterday, but the pace was not too difficult to keep up with though we fell back going downhill. A little before reaching the 'chhagon' [graveyard] it started to rain and we put up the umbrellas that we'd brought. Durga took one and gave a 'bakkhu' to Alan to wear. We covered our cameras in coats.

In a wooded place, among piles of stones - other graves, the bier was lowered. We were not allowed to go near it. Only the men who would perform the burial were there digging a hole, cutting wood for a fire. When we were near the spot, people - men and women - had picked up stones, and now they piled these up. They will be used to build the 'chhagon'. We stayed a very short time. Everyone was keen to leave as the rain increased.

The walk back was exhausting - trying not to stop, holding the umbrella, wrapping my 'pachhyaura' [cloak] round my head, and covering my camera, all at the same time. Outside the village is a new Panchayat house in process of being built. There were two very small fires inside which we had to walk over to purify ourselves before entering the village. There the paths were running streams, with buffalo dung adding to the unpleasantness. At the house, before we entered Durga's mother sprinkled us with water.

Found the first entrance into the courtyard the most harrowing. Found it hard not to cry, but noticed men talking and joking normally and this was the pattern throughout. When we passed the school, children and teachers shouted greetings and people smiled at us. No one seemed the slightest bit worried by our filming.

On looking at my notes I see that I have omitted to write that before the stretcher was brought out of the house there was a beating of cymbals in 3.4 time. The pachhyu went into the house carrying two long bamboo strips (like basket strips) - for tying up the corpse? The baby had been born at midnight on 21st and the mother died at 2.00pm the following day when it had started to

rain. Rain seemed most appropriate today too, just as she reached the graveyard. It was confirmed that the after-birth didn't come away.

Film

Mountains above Tangting
Siklis over the valley
Long shot of pachhyus drumming at dead girl's house
Little girl playing at building a house
Men waiting outside house
Door of house and women wailing, pachhyu and klehbri drumming
Preparing to bring out the corpse
Man with stake aims it at door, turns round, and aims again
Corpse being carried out
Followed by weeping girls, their 'kramu' over their faces and the dead girl's young brother with bow and arrow, lastly older women and a man (father?)
Klehbri dancing with his bird symbol followed by a boy beating cymbals and another drumming
they circle the corpse while women wail, and one stands with hands on corpse, her hair unplaited
Women wailing; edifice of cigarettes and flowers; arrow released from bow; dressing the corpse with a purple sari; attaching edifice to corpse; giving money
Klehbri rubbing the "bird" over corpse, cymbals beating; women unplat hair
The 'Ala' then 'ghyan' [white sheet = 'path'] leading priests, wailing women, brother with bow, and corpse, then more women, some very affected, then men - leaves the village
Klehbri doing a small rite outside village
Procession moving, passes school with children watching, then 'ghyan' snakes on, over a suspension bridge, eagles hovering, up a rocky path, to the graveyard
Graveyard - people carrying stones for the grave; woman replaiting hair; men in 'bokku' carrying stones
A purification rite, stepping over fire before re-entering the village ('suiva')
Photos of the dead woman
A pachhyu priest working out an appropriate name for the orphaned infant
The infant in the arms of his grand-mother

CHHYEMPHAR (LAMA FUNERAL)

Funeral 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641080>

Alan notes the Lama funeral doesn't seem too different from a pachhyu funeral, but I don't think pachhyu light anything, though we've not seen this part of a pachhyu rite. They certainly hang an 'ala' from the eaves and use a 'ghyan'.

Cremation October 12 October 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647320>

Notes

Heard a man talking urgently outside the house to Surje and the 'ccadwala' calling, and later confirmed that it signalled the death of Durgabahadur. Remembering Yokbahadur his father who died in the same house expect it will be a lama funeral and that his body will be carried down to the river for cremation. We later learnt that he would be cremated in the usual place as the river is too far.

The funeral was a hasty affair. The lama was not at home but had gone to Tangting, and the pachhyu had already left. Appeared that Kumbasing acted in lieu of the lama and all the remaining village Kwonme and Lamme were there including Debiprasad, Benbahadur, and Rudrabahadur. Hanu was drumming and Minbahadur played the cymbals. Ude was 'moh' (or asyon) and fired the arrow to spear the bamboo circle first. A little money was

gathered, hopefully to give to the widow who is terribly thin and has a little daughter to bring up. Indrakumari, his niece, led the female mourners and Kamiri was the sole keener. All the men were hatless and the women without 'kramu'. Bimbahadur, Surje, Dankaji, Budibahadur and others carried the 'ghyan' poles, and Kumbasing's brother, Balasing, carried the small 'ala' - barely more than a flag. Ude was one of the body carriers.

We followed them to the burning site. It was nearer than before as the landslip beside the old Sarki houses has increased and it's hard to get across to the old place. The 'ghyan' curtains the body from general view but leave it open behind so that the men preparing the body can work. We saw them cutting off the clothes with 'ashee' and gingerly moving pieces of cloth from the ground with sticks. Finally burnt everything - all clothing, all bedding. Sarishaw started to sob remembering her father's death about this time last year, then Kamiri sobbed again for her brother, but that was all. Although they gave him a respectable funeral, there was some urgency to dispose of a corpse that was already putrefying according to Alan who filmed the last grizzly burning of the body.

On the way back we washed in 'mara kew' at the spring near the old Sarki houses and then, with some effort, they managed to get Sundari, Durgabahadur's mother-in-law, to bring out some burning embers and 'dhup' and more 'mara kew' to purify us before entering the village.

Film

Goprasad and wife, Benkumari
Durgabahadur's wrapped corpse
People gathering round the corpse of Durgabahadur
Bringing out the body, sound of woman keening, people watching.
Putting a small bunch of chrysanthemums where the bunch leaves is usually put on the body. Kamiri rubs them
Indrakumari, the widow, comes out with incense sticks
Putting garlands of flowers and money on the body, Indrakumari lighting incense
Puspa breaking Indrakumari's bangles
Men giving money to the corpse.
Kumbasing taking the money and announcing the name of the donor
Kamiri keening over the corpse and then pulled away by Puspa
Indrakumari weeping

Blessing Mansing before he spikes a piece of wood by the gate with a pointed stick
Debiprasad blessed before spiking a bamboo ring.
Men waiting with the 'ghyan' unfurled
Men lift the corpse on their shoulders and carry it off followed by crowd
Corpse being carried along to the cremation ground preceded by the 'ghyan'
Preparing the pyre
Women sitting on the hillside above, their view restricted by the 'ghyan' until the corpse is 'respectable'
Ude sprinkling salt around the pyre
The women bring down incense and circle the pyre
Kamiri keens until taken away by Indrakumari
Removing cloths and bedding
Lighting the pyre. The women, including Sarah, leave at this point.
The body burning.
Nainasing brushing a man with a bunch of leaves to spiritually cleanse him
Ritual cleansing by men at the spring after leaving the cremation ground
Incense and 'mara kyu' prepared by Sundari's daughter-in-law, Shitamaya, to ritually cleanse the men before they re-enter the village

Funeral feast (bhow saba) 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647293>

Durgabhadur had died and was cremated on the 12th October (see film) This feast on 14th was presided over by Lama.

Six Gurung Sacred Dances

THE GHATU DANCE

(also can be spelt Ghatto, Ghamtu, Garda etc)

From Pignède, *Gurungs*, pp. 327-8

Ghatu: This festival takes place during the month of Maghe (January-February) (Shree Panchami). It is no longer celebrated in the Modi valley. It was done for the last time at Ghaundrung thirteen years ago. Nowadays, the young Gurungs do not know how to do the necessary dances for the celebration of this festival. In Lamjung this tradition has been kept. As with the Mahda dance, that of Ghatu takes place on the terrace of the *kroh*. It lasts for four days. A girl aged about 12 years does it. A narrator tells, phrase by phrase, a long story which is gradually taken up by a chorus accompanied by drums and the audience clapping its hands, gathered in a circle. A series of descriptive dances are done first of all: the dancer carries a plate of rice, then a small vase of water and a basket (*dihkya*); she goes down on a boat from Tirbeni to Baglung on the river Kali situated to the west of the Modi valley; she transplants rice; she goes hunting; she gathers and arranges flowers.

Then the story begins. One day, King Parasuram left on a journey and went to Lawakot, Salunkot, Bhirkot, Gruhkot, Dhurkot, Musikot and Ghalekot. He reached Nandpur where he encountered King Singh of Garwal. He was vanquished and died. A crow carried the sad news to the country of King Parasuram which was called Kyakot. For his part, a poor man brought the turban of her dead husband to Queen Satyawati. At the sight of these two messengers, she was frightened and, having seen a particular sign in the cow's milk, she was convinced that her husband was dead. She ordered that they burn her together with her lord's turban.

This story is told in Nepali. From which historical period might it come? Why is it told on the occasion of the festival of Shree Panchami? The informant could tell me nothing just as when I asked the same questions on the subject of the story narrated during the Mahda dance. Could one see in Ghatu an anniversary of the defeat and death of a Gurung prince in a battle against foreign invaders? There are not enough facts to confirm this. But this story is none the less interesting. It shows how the Gurungs sometimes make use of the Nepalo-Indian traditions. They tell us here of the death of a queen

who wished to follow her husband into death according to the Hindu custom (*sati*). But I have never heard of such a custom existing in the Gurung country in the last hundred years. It is even probable that it has never been.

Appendix D. The Ghatu Dance (Pignède, pp.465- 469) by Alan Macfarlane

With the memorial service (*paē*), the Ghatu is the most purely Gurung institution and hence worth a fuller description. Pignède's account is necessarily brief since he never saw the dance performed.

The dance is inaugurated on Maghe Shree Panchami (the crescent moon in Maghe, i.e. near the end of January). Parts of it are danced from time to time until the full moon in Baisakh (end of April), when the whole dance is performed. This final performance lasts from morning to evening for three days. Not a single episode must be omitted; if a mistake is made it is believed that the dancing girls will become sick and may die. The dance usually takes place outside in the courtyard of whoever is sponsoring it, though the first session takes place inside a house, and the last at a customary meeting place in the village.

Usually two to four girls do the dance. They are most often chosen from within the Kugi, although there is no rule regarding this, by the dance master (*guru aba*) who will teach them. He gathers a number of likely girls, aged about 12 to 14. They must be pre-pubertal, and will commonly dance over a period of three years. The *guru aba* will start a special chant which calls down the gods, (Deochuli, Barchuli, Hiunchuli, Gangachuli), "Gunga, Huwe-salli, Dew salle". Rice is sprinkled on the girls. One or two of the girls will be possessed (*gard nyeva* or *gard khaba*) by one of the gods, sitting and swaying the top half of their bodies in a circle with eyes closed. These are the ones who are selected to be the dancers. If a sufficient number of susceptible girls cannot be found, one or two others may be added.

The *guru aba* then instructs them in the various dance movements. The dance is broken into many *dada* or sequences, each with a slightly different dance movement, accompanying the story which Pignède has briefly outlined. Sometimes the girls dance these in a possessed state, being brought out of the trance after each dance by flicking a little water up their nose, sometimes the girls dance in a normal

state. They wear special clothes, consisting of the old Gurung dress, and gold and other jewellery. They are helped in dressing and supported at certain crucial times, as described later, by special assistants of about their own age, who are called *adil rimeh* (or *susari rimeh*) - "the girls who bring" .

In the initial dance, the girls sit on small wooden stools on a mat which has been placed over a specially cleaned floor. Later they will sit on the mat, faced by a row of about twelve men who do the singing, a slow chant to the rhythm of a double-ended drum. The dance is extremely graceful, twisting, rising, and sinking, then turning in a squatting position with the hands just touching the ground. Especially important are the hand movements, particularly the flicking of the second and third fingers, which are rubbed against each other.

The story has been written down and is much as Pignède relates, but much longer. In Thak, the Queen's name was not Satiwati but Yampawoti. Pignède has no information on its origins. Informants said that it was of Gurung origin. Only Gurungs and Magars do this dance, which is unknown elsewhere in Nepal or India. We were told the names of the Gods came from the Terai, but that the source of the dance was in the central region of Gorkha. It is only danced between Lamjung and Gorkha, from the top of the Marsyangdi river down to the Magars south of Gorkha. It was thought that Paseram was a King of Gorkha. There are no Brahmins in the story.

The story is set around Gorkha, with the river where the bodies were taken being called the Jamuna Khola. We were told that the dance was of ancient origin, having been performed since the Gurungs came into this area. Although the language is an old form of Nepali and the story, as Pignède notes, has Hindi elements, this does seem a very distinctive Gurung institution. Like other such institutions it is fading away, as the old men who know the songs die, young girls have less time from their school-work and the rich soldiers who paid for performances no longer come to the village.

The Ghatto Sheva at Ianjacote, 24 February 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1640988>

Notes

The Gatu Sheva was due to start at 10.00am. but we are still waiting here at 1.00pm., though the girls are here and getting dressed. The clouds are massing again. About 1.10pm. they started the Ghatto. One of the girls was immediately possessed by a goddess as if the beginning of the guru aba's chanting hypnotised her. She only came out of the trance when he flicked water in her face. Found the chanting very haunting and beautiful, and the whole was a moving experience.

Film

Guru Aba describes.

Starts to sing with other men, a slow chant, seemingly wordless. One girl shut eyes and slowly began to sway forward, possessed by the god. For ten minutes at least this continues until Guru aba splashes water in her face and she comes to.

Then drum accompanies singers and the girls take up the water pots and begin to sway with them, turning slowly, swinging up and down.

Put pots down and begin to sway without them, with fingers poised. Again, circling round on the floor and rising slowly. This movement done many times. All the time the Guru aba conducts them. Girls intricate hand movements. Old men almost as hypnotised by their chanting as the girls. Words about the girls playing with the gods. Hair intricately decorated with flowers, held in place by a thin, tight length of hair, plaited at the back to hold the flowers in place. Some 16 men, including Guru aba, singing - 2 drums.

Without drums. Girls sitting and washing their hands. The marriage of the King and Queen - wedding song.

Accompanied by drums and clapping to signify putting oil on their heads - anointing the King and Queen. They rub palms together to signify the oil in the hand.

Small stick in hand- represents comb - doing hair. Dancers and singers, slightly different rhythm.

Combs put down - slow rhythm continues. They symbolically plait their hair and put a ribbon in it. Foot movement - turn on their heels using their toes to move themselves.

'Chai khyaba' - For this we had to sit on the floor behind the dancers, facing the singers. They dance with trays of milk, rice and flowers, then they put 'chai khyaba' and garlands on us. They place the trays on each of our heads in turn. Balasing -> Alan -> me -> Kaji Soba -> Durga, and back and forth. Then money given - 1000rs. from Alan.

Notes made at the performance

The Ghatto performance can start from the time of Sarswati Puja (31st Jan.) until Baisakh Purnima. They can perform any part - any 'dada' - for money, like this, but at Baisakh Purnima, done on stage in front of the Health Post. Then they sing for three days in shifts. Not 4-5 days. Ghatto - holy dance, done at auspicious occasions like weddings, etc. Same girls dance for three days.

Ghat = place where cremation occurs. King Parasuram and Queen Yemphawati, and gods and goddesses, Deochuli, Barchuli, Ghangachuli - all history of the Ghatto based on them. Done at Baisakh Purnima. They must sing every 'dada' - every verse. If they don't then the girls can become mentally disturbed. Two grades of singer - 'guru aba' - some sing accompaniments, some the difficult 'dada'.

Alan asked possessed dancer what she saw. Said she felt the goddess rather than saw her - felt frightened. This girl had never been possessed before she became a Ghatto dancer.

Ghatto is principally danced between Lamjung and Gorkha, but also over the whole Gandi region – the top of the Marsyangdi river. Magars live south of this at Satighat. Magars don't do the Ghatto so looks as if they adopted it from the Gurungs. Mainly Lamjung - Yangjakot was in Lamjung. Balasing's great-great-grandfather, Gyanjankri, brought the Ghatto to Yangjakot. Pasaram is Gorkha king? - no Brahmin in story.

The Yangjakot Ghato performance in Thak, 1992 - night



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1640980>

Notes

After eating, the girls began to dress in their dance costumes. We followed them up to Badrasing's platform, and there we saw masses of people sitting, standing, on the ground, on all the platforms and verandahs, waiting in expectation. Some juggling with the pressure lamps so that Alan could get the brightest light on the dancers, and then they began - the haunting song. The girls danced beautifully - perfectly controlled. Lovely to watch the entranced faces of the audience who have mostly never seen this dance.

Film

Dancers preparing for the dance
Dancers seated at the start of the ritual in front of the 'guru aba'

Men begin to chant, dancers begin to rock backwards and forwards
prior to trance, then sway gently from side to side in trance; Dancers'
faces as they begin to sway
Old men chanting - the 'guru aba', also Badrasing; girls in trance,
women behind the girls gently steadying their movements - the
'nyelshaw'
Dancers, out of trance, wiping their faces, chanting stops
Dancers dancing with brass water pots
Dancers, finger clicking and with men's hats on
Dancers, then Hima in audience watching, then other girls
Man drumming
Dancers clicking fingers
Dancers seated, swaying
Dancers now standing, new hand movement
Further scenes of the dance and audience

Yanjakot ghatto at Thak, day-time, April 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647328>

Notes

The first we were aware of the dancers was the sound of the singers and drums. We went up, and had a lively, less crowded view in the light. Such a haunting sound coupled with slow, graceful movements. Really entrancing. Though there is little obvious variation one finds it utterly absorbing. After a while, we were ushered to sit on a rug in front of the girls - I, Alan, Gerry and Hilda - and they did the slow dance, turning just in front of us. We could see the singers as they dipped below us or twisted sideways.

After the 'chai khyaba', the girls came and sat in front of us and Alan was able to question them on which god entered them (they didn't know the name). What the 'guru aba' said to them. "Where are you going? What are you doing? Hunting etc." They were so sweet and open, sitting very close to Alan, one putting a hand on his knee while explaining. So unspoilt and natural. After they had eaten - 'kunni' with tea, then rice and vegetables - there was a short dance, men with the girls, Alan and Bhuwansing first, then Durgabhadur and Gerry. Very cheerful. I filmed.

Ghato performed in Ianjakot, May 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1640952>

Notes

Alan went up to the Ghatto stage just in case anything should happen and I went later. They are still practising at present. There are only two girls. Another is coming from Pokhara this evening. They are dressed in 'ngui', 'pro', 'phagi' and 'tigisa', and one wears a 'kramu' as her hair is short. Both have old necklaces of gold, turquoise and coral beads. The stage is pretty with its concertina paper and leaves. There is a rainproof awning over the lot. The dance floor is a very large 'pyoh'. The singers sit on 'gundri'. There are two drummers. The house where the stage is set belongs to Ketabsing, an ex-politician married to Uli Kancha's older sister.

A preliminary account of the 'dada' (verses) given by Balasing's father: 1. 'Deota teba - ghatto teba kwi deota'. 2. 'jui ardiba' - calling god. 3. 'Asar ruiba' - planting rice. 4. 'Pho lhaba dada' - hunting deer. 5. 'Kew khaba' - fetching water. 6. 'Kwe kiba dada' - fetching clothes. 7. 'Lade lava dada' - war. 8. Widow sati.

Ghatto second day

11.56. Came up to find drumming already started but the Guru Abas were teaching the girls another step, so this may be a practise session. Women and girls threading popped rice onto slivers of bamboo. 'Lade lava dada' - making war. More people here than yesterday. A third Ghatto girl has appeared, but not yet dancing. 12.00. Now the three start to dance – girls given a wooden sword and something shaped like a spoon ('Lapan dal' - some sort of weapon). In front of them, a Guru Aba moves a little animal figure. The animal is a horse. A few slightly younger men singing today. Surje is sitting with them again.

12.15. Swords, etc. removed. Another necklace added to two of the girls. The basket with paper crowns and threaded rice in front of the Guru Abas. 12.45. The King is dead and his goods taken off. (Explanation to Alan: The "spoon" is a protection against a sword. The horse is the King's horse). 12.52. Male singing section. Have vases (brass) in front of them. Cover the tops with leaves. The news hasn't yet reached the Queen, but slowly his goods filter back. [Girls wanted a photo taken of them, but can't move off the central area]. Coral and turquoise necklaces - a good one 60,000rs. Worms eat the coral. Must be cleaned with 'moditil'. 1.18. 'Gard kaba' - Ghatto god comes into the body. They don't know which one. Trance - girls holding a piece of wood 'a "sceptre" called 'jamudar'. In trance with no singing, just gently swaying. Men chanting round them. Cup their hands. Water. Two girls fail to wash face at first go. Second, wash faces, out of trance. Queen refuses to believe King is dead when she sees his goods. Only when she sees his blood on some clothes does she know he is dead. ['Chodi' - leaf like a chrysanthemum with pungent smell used to bring girls out of trance at one stage - when?]

Came back as we saw the dancers getting nearer our house, but now it's raining quite heavily, and they may well have taken shelter or given up. In fact, they went down to Balasing's father's house first, then ours. A large group led by a small Tailors' band, followed by a lot of rowdy youths, then the Ghatto dancers and the Guru Abas. The Tailors' band accompanied some noisy singing, shoving and stamping. Some 'kwe pa' had been put in a

basin, and the boys were surreptitiously ladling out saucepanfuls to consume. They had clearly found some at other houses as a number looked pretty drunk.

Sadly, the finals and the finale of the Ghatto had to be postponed because of the rain, so we were unable to witness the climax, when the Queen is encouraged by the Abas to commit 'sati' while the 'nyelshaw' try to stop her.

Film

Men singing. Two girls, seated, going into trance
Two girls start swaying
Girls given water to wash their faces, then they stand up
Men start to sing again. Two girls holding 'kule' in their hands
Two girls start to dance slowly holding caps in their hands
Two girls sitting down, swaying and holding caps
Girls standing, wearing caps and swaying, then dancing
Garlands hanging up under rafters
Girl (Pintimaya) resting and holding baby while men continue to sing
Two girls dancing standing up, facing singers
Surje sitting behind the singers.
Girls dancing, clicking their fingers.
All stop and rest
Men singing without the drum, girls resting
Girls dancing holding sticks but without caps
Man holds girl's hand and stick to show her how to use it properly. Girls start dancing again holding sticks
Two girls start dancing with sticks
Playing the drum, girls dancing in background
Two women watching, one a dancer in a previous film taken 1991
Girls lying on a mat, resting
Musicians playing while girls remain on floor
Pintimaya (dancer) with bare bottomed baby on her lap beside musicians
Two drummers playing, one of them Balasing's father, while others sing

15 May 1995

Herd of goats going past dance place
Girls dressing for the dance
'Guru aba' pouring out cups of 'pa' while others continue to play and sing
Two girls shown dance moves by two 'guru aba' (one Balasing's father) accompanied by musicians

Three girls (another has joined them) sitting down, holding wooden
 knives and, what looks like, wooden spoons
 Dancing slowly while seated, 'guru aba' with a wooden horse
 Dancer (Pintimaya) in a trance, two other girls also seated holding
 wooden knives, then all in a trance
 Musicians stop but the girls continue to sway in trance. Given water in
 their cupped hands to wash their faces. Once they do so they come out
 of trance
 Dancers seated, rocking slowly and swaying, in trance again
 No drumming, just singing. Watched by little girls who some day might
 also be dancers
 All three girls swaying, in trance, holding white paper crowns in their
 hands
 'Guru Aba' and a 'nyelshaw' take the head-scarf off one girl and place a
 paper crown on her head. 'Guru aba' and another 'nyelshaw' tie the new
 dancer's crown on.
 All three girls wearing crowns and swaying, in trance. 'Guru aba' throw
 rice over their heads then place little hoops with pop-corn threaded on
 them to embellish crowns on their heads. Three girls with hoops on
 their heads swaying while men sing without the drum
 'Guru aba' (Karsing) taking hoops and crowns off the girls' heads and
 brushing rice out of their hair, still in trance
 Two girls swaying, middle girl (Pintimaya) sitting with eyes open but
 when 'guru aba' (Karsing) places hoops and crown on her head
 momentarily, she goes into trance again. Does the same to new girl who
 also goes back into trance.
 Brought out of trance with water again
 Tailors' band and 'Ghatto' dancers and musicians going from house to
 house
 Group of boys walking down path, drumming and clapping, followed by
 dancers
 'Ghatto' dancers performing, musicians playing, people watching, at one
 house while Tailors' band playing and boys dancing at a house beyond
 Boys singing and dancing to Tailors' band, three girls sitting down
 watching while musicians sing
 Girls start dancing, boys in background still dancing and singing

16 May

'Ghatto' dancers and musicians, and Tailors' band, perambulating again
 People standing up holding umbrellas, three girls dance among them.
 People clapping, boys dancing in background, girls dancing in middle of
 the crowd, holding vases with leaves in them
 Little boy being encouraged to do the 'Kusun' and 'ghatto' by Judy and
 grandparents

KUSUN

Alan Macfarlane, Appendix D of Pignède *Gurungs*, pp. 467-9

While the Ghatu is very important, we were told that an accompanying ritual, the Kusun (*kusun teba* - to hold a Kusun) was even more important and significant. Again, this was probably danced quite widely, but now only one or two villages still do it, for instance Bhujung and Yangjakot. Given its importance and the fact that it has never, to our knowledge, been described, it is worth giving in full a description of the performance which we saw in Yangjakot, danced in the evening after the Ghatu. The Kusun is part of the final three-day dance at *Baisakh Purnima*.

The dance always takes place at night, outside, sometimes with the light of pressure lamps, with those girls who can go into possession and the same group of old men, who sing a similar-sounding chant. At the start, the girls are given sticks to represent hunting bows. Three girls started the dance, which was similar to that in the Ghatu. The sequence is repeated at least ten times, and the story tells of the slaying of a deer.

At this point the girls leave and the two drummers move forward to play the special *kusun* rhythm. They must play the full rhythm, and later the full counter-rhythm, otherwise they say the girls will be very ill and may die. The girls return, their necklaces and jewellery are taken from them to prevent them from destroying them. They let down their hair. Other girls, their *adil rimih* sit in a row behind them. The *guru aba* rubs ash on their throats, and on the throats of the singers, saying a mantra (*nd*). This is done to protect the body (*ju bar lava*) and to protect the girls from the evil eye. The *guru aba* talks quietly to the girls.

The drums begin a new rhythm, men chant, and the girls, sitting, begin to toss their heads wildly round and round in a rolling movement. The rhythm gets faster and they toss and sway, apparently likely to break their necks as they thrash with their heads and torsos, sweeping their hair on the ground and just missing each other's heads. This continues for ten minutes or so and then one girl collapses backwards and lies still. She is cushioned in the lap of her friend and her head covered with a cloth. Then the other girls each collapse after a few

minutes. The drumming stops. The old men smoke and drink a little and then start to sing without a drum.

Slowly the girls get up, faces like sleep-walkers, eyes staring, slightly unsteady, clearly in a deep trance. They wander about scratching themselves, their arms, legs, face. They are then handed a strange pipe -one pull on the pipe and they hand it back. The pipe has a small bowl attached in which something is burning. They rub a little of this substance on the *guru aba's* head.

The *guru aba* the first girl who she is, and she says the King, and the second girl says she is the Queen. They are asked where they have come from. They answer, from the Himalayas, from Sunkuri, a place near Kailash, that they are hunting. They are asked if they have travelling expenses; the King says "yes", the Queen, "no".

Then the drums start again, they are getting ready to hunt again. The girls start their slow haunting steps again, but with less poise, eyes blank and drowsy. They are given the sticks to hold again. Suddenly one girl stops and turns angrily to the verandah. The small boys, crowded there, duck. Someone has mentioned the word "buffalo". Any mention of this, or of anything to do with a buffalo, sends the girls into a rage. A girl throws her stick at them angrily. One tries to undo her dress and is restrained. After further threats at the crowd and waving of sticks, they drift off with the end of their waistbands (*phogi*) held like an apron, in which they collect coins and notes. Refusal to give will again enrage them. They return and tip the money out at the *guru aba's* feet.

The girls then sit down and the drum rhythm starts again. The girls are handed the sticks, again and again they dance in a trance. The drums then play the counter-rhythm and the girls begin to toss their heads and the top half of their bodies as in the first session. The "King" does this for four minutes, the "Queen" for six minutes and the third girl for ten minutes. They fall back as before, unconscious. The last girl had to have water splashed in her face to finally release her from the trance state. She immediately resumes her normal look and mechanically gathers up her hair and puts it in a ponytail. The whole session ended at 12.30 a.m., lasting some four hours.

The *guru aba* has no explanation for the possession or why the girls should react so strongly at the mention of the word "buffalo". We were told that the ritual dance concerned the Kusunta gods. One informant said that if asked where she had come from, the girl in a trance would say Palpa, though we have seen a different answer in the description above. The Kusunta gods live high up in the forests and

dislike human beings. They live on wild forest produce such as *taro* and *feme*. The gods look people and hunt with bows and arrows. On one occasion the gods were washing vegetables in the river and some humans came higher up the river and made the water filthy with buffalo dung. This infuriated the Kusunta who killed the offenders with their bows and arrows. The Kusunta are polluted by buffaloes. This may be linked to the very strong belief in the pollution of the buffalo shown in the fact that village priests, *pujari*, have to be people who do not eat buffalo, and that pachyu cannot eat buffalo.

The Kusun is obviously a dangerous and powerful ritual. If the rhythm is played accidentally, susceptible girls will go into a trance and if the correct counter-rhythm is not played they will finally die. We were told of a case where a girl went into such a fit merely by hearing a tape-recording of the rhythm. Fortunately, the counter-rhythm was also recorded and released the girl. I saw another case twenty years ago where a girl became possessed and remained so for over ten hours until a man who knew the correct counter-rhythm could be brought from a nearby village.

Kusun in Ianjacote 24 February 1990

Notes

Sticks given to each girl to represent hunting bows. Three girls started dancing at first, then the fourth though shy and embarrassed accepts the stick. They click their fingers on the sticks - forefinger and second finger, in a scissor movement. Again, two guru aba seem to be conducting them up and down - a writhing, snake-like movement. Sequence repeated at least ten times, two Ghatto Sheva girls in the middle. In song, sitting at the crossing path of deer, then arrow fired at deer, but no change in dance. The smallest girl withdraws, refuses to dance and sits behind. Same monotonous steps. People sit talking all round, but neither singers nor girls disturbed.

At this point, all girls leave and two drummers move forward to play the Kusun rhythm. They must play the right rhythm, if they done; know the full rhythm and counter-rhythm, it can be very dangerous. Huge crowd. People enjoy the Kusun. The girls return, then necklaces and jewellery taken from them to prevent them destroying them. They let down their hair (braided as for Ghatto, without the flowers). Other girls sit behind them to look

after them, and prevent them from taking off their clothes. Guru aba puts mantra into their mouths. Only three girls are possessed, the fourth sits out. The guru aba talks to them quietly. The mantra - 'jew bar lava' - to protect girls from the evil eye. Drums begin a new rhythm, men chant, and the girls, sitting, begin to toss their heads wildly from side to side in a rolling movement. If the drum rhythm was broken at any point it would be dangerous for them. The two Guru Aba try to hold their hands. Then one girl collapses backwards. Quickly covered with 'pachhyaura' by girls behind. The little Ghatto girl goes faster and faster. Next girl collapses, then the smallest. The drums stop, singers stop, and the girls lie inert, unconscious. Will remain so until next rhythm played.

Kusun in Ianjacote: 15 May 1992

So much chatting that it was difficult to hear the Guru Abas, but the girls began dancing as for the Ghatto, but with little bows and arrows. This seemed to go on for a very long time. The crowd expectant, then bored. Finally, with shouts and screams and a lot of mayhem, four youths rushed in, dressed in rags, two as old men, two as women. They are 'jogi' (male) and 'jogini' (female) whom the King and two Queens of the Kusun meet when they return from hunting. Jogi are professional beggars. Surje says they worship no god, but men who give them money, etc. However, they appear to be based on Hindu renouncers. Much joking with the audience which we couldn't follow too easily, but one of the "women" held up a baby and signalled that her husband played cards, beat her, gave her babies and then begged for money. The Ghatto girls play a game of dice ('tirpas') with them, and the girls win. Before the game, the King is asked by the Guru Aba where they have been, what have they been doing, etc. The 'jogi' finally start to extract money from the crowd, threatening to put ash under their chins if they don't. A rupee per 'jogi' suffices. Finally, with screams they rush out again causing the same slight panic in the audience, and us.

Badrasing on Kusun 18 April 1992

Badrasing described the Kusunta again as aboriginal people, like a Malayan group called Sakai - same size as Gurungs - Togari,

the same jat at the King. Use bows and arrows, and blowpipes to kill birds. He knows they are like Sakai through information from soldiers in Hongkong, etc.

NOTE ON FILMS

The films of the Kusun contain material (music) which should not be shown publicly. It is dangerous for some viewers. It may be viewed, with permission, at the Tamu Pye Lhu Sang headquarters (Khoimbo) in Pokhara and possibly at the Gurung cultural museum in Siklis.

As it is such an important event, and still photographs are not dangerous, photos of one Kusun performance in 1992 are included as an appendix at the end.

Krishna Charitra

Pirkko Moisala in her book *Cultural Cognition in Music* (1991) provides a detailed analysis of what she terms the Krishna Caritra (pp. 244-301 and Appendix 3) to which those who wish to investigate further should refer. She explains that 'The performance genre of the Krishna Caritra was devised in the 1920's by Subba (local headman) Narjang Gurung, who lived in the village of Ghanpokhara in Lamjung district. He adapted the text of the song from the life story of Lord Krishna of the Sanskrit epic, adopted the melodies and rhythmic patterns from an older Gurung musical tradition, the Sorathi. The style of dancing was modified from the Sorathi dance, as well.

She outlines it thus: 'The performed story consists of seven episodes which describe different phases and happenings in the life of Lord Krishna: Krishna's birth, his childhood, Krishna and Radha, the snake, Krishna's love, the *holi*, and the seizing of the garments. Each of the episodes contains several smaller parts which, in turn, are divided into beginning, middle and ending verses which may or may not be preceded by a preface or a *satak*, a prayer.' She states that 'The complete performance of the Krishna Caritra lasts for thirteen hours.' Furthermore, it is performed by 'four male dancers, four *madal* drum players, and a group of male singers. Two of the male dancers perform in a male role, two in a female role. The dancers dressed in the female costume symbolize Krishna's beloved Radha, the others Krishna.'

From Pignède, *Gurungs*, pp.319 ff.

At *Dasarah*, a long dance of a very original character is done. It is called *mahda* (or *sorati*, nep.) and is danced during six days in front of the kroh's house. Two young men dress up in women's clothes. Two others in male costume are their partners. A huge circle is formed round them. A narrator starts to sing a long story which gives the theme of the dance, and in which each phrase is repeated by the audience. The songs are accompanied by the *madal* (small drum), and the *mohyar* (small cymbal) and the clapping of hands by the audience.

The story tells of the life of the King Jaisingh and Queen Bhimalai in the country of Amina. They had a daughter called Soroti. The brahmin consulted to make her horoscope and to say what the future would be for the child discovered that she would have a brilliant life. She would become very wise and very intelligent. He was alarmed as he saw that already the princess surpassed him with her knowledge. Therefore, he told the parents that she would have a miserable life and that she would kill her father and mother. The latter were frightened and locked the child in a gold chest and let it go down a stream. Two fishermen dreamt that night that the next day would be a good one for fishing. All morning, they cast their net and one can imagine their surprise when pulling it in to discover in the mesh a gold chest. "We must share our prize", they said. "I will take the box", said one, whose name was Jaliari, "I will keep what is in it", retorted Kumal, the second fisherman. This they did. One carried away the box and the other the child who was in the box. When Soroti was brought into the fisherman's cottage, it became a palace. The child was fed with yak milk. Later on, as King Jaisingh was hunting, he saw a magnificent house in the woods. He returned there to ask for a drink. A young girl brought him water. Astonished by her beauty, the king asked Soroti's adoptive father for the hand of the young girl. Kumal gave her to him. Many princes came to be at the wedding celebrations. It was then that Princess Soroti revealed to King Jaisingh that she was his daughter. The marriage ceremony was annulled and the lying brahmin banished. He went away and settled in the country of Khangara. The king of that country called him to his palace to ask him what would be the fate of the nine queens, his wives. The brahmin told him that all nine would have an unhappy future. He added: "A young happy princess lives near a man called Kumal. You must marry her". The king sent his nephew Bijaibharat to find the princess. After twelve years the nephew found Soroti. "I gave you five years to do this journey", cried the king to Bijaibharat, "and you have been away for twelve years. You must certainly have lived with that princess during all these years. I no longer wish to marry her". Soroti then said to the king that she wanted to go back to her country but the king refused to agree to her request and built her a magnificent palace.

Krishna Charitra - 1990 – Yangjakot



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1640996>

Notes

Rushed from breakfast in the house of Bhuwansing's wife's sister to the top of the village to watch the Krishna Charitra, a dance done by men who dress as women. It is done for the god Sarasoti and is the story of Krishna from the Mahabharat. Starts with a 'jew bar lava' to protect the dancers from the evil eye. Two "women" - 'marooni', and the man as 'bichibar'. All wear skirts, but the women dress in saris, 'tigisa', veils etc. and wear bells round the ankles. A mixture of Gurung dress and Indian. There are three drummers. The drums are wrapped in cloth too, and one tiny cymbal player. We entered the courtyard through an arch of flowers - rhododendrons. There were three chairs with covers on seats and a table for us. The stage was set up like last night with rugs around.

They started dancing after a short practice session. The first dance is called 'Kali' - much circling of men and "women" in a line, in pairs. At times the drummers dance alone, at other times,

the group. The guru aba is there leading the singers - aged 82 years. At one point, Balasing volunteered to show us how he was possessed by the god Sarasoti when a certain rhythm was played. The first drum rhythm ends abruptly, he is taken over and his hands go rigid and hands and arms shake. He would stay like this until the counter rhythm played. Alan lost the last bit so asked later that the end be played in case of accident with other Gurungs. The battery ran out just before the last minute the second time. Consternation.

The dance ended with the 'chai khyaba' dance, similar to the Garda Sheva. Then they insisted we ate - fried eggs and tea. Took a photograph of one of the dancers who had put off his return to Calcutta until tomorrow, so he could dance for us. Said he'd not danced it for thirteen years, yet he did it perfectly, remembering all the words. Were told that this dance was written by a man in Ghanpokhara some eighty years ago, a Suba called Narjung Gurung. It came via Bhujung to Yangjakot sixty years ago.

Comment by Badrasing Gurung

Gurungs, Magars only. Rather similar to 'Soroti' - men dress us as women. The 'guru aba' was Bolbahadur (Abjon of Badrasing) - used to do - takes three days; sung in Nepali - Still in Yangjakot, this village alone stops; they do this in Panighat - Kesaram is 'guru aba'. Story of Krishna. Women don't dance this.

Krishna Charitra in Pokhara on October 2010



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641004>

Notes

Flew from Kathmandu to Pokhara ... Went up at once to the Siklis Samaj where the Ngobje were having a 'ri-chahmi' (sister's and daughters). They had waited for us to arrive before starting to dance the 'Krishna Charitra'.

Surje 'tarava' (was possessed) and was a singer who knew the words. Krishna had written them out but also sang. The girls' parts were danced by girls rather than men in women's dress. Raila was the Master of Ceremonies, the driving force, and most of the singers and dancers were linked to Panighat (a hamlet near Thak).

THREE DANCES FROM THE MEMORIAL RITUAL (Pae Lava)

Rhi-teba 1995



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641128>

This is a duelling dance held outside the village. Two klehbri priests try to capture the bone of the dead person from two dancers who elude them for a while, but are finally captured.

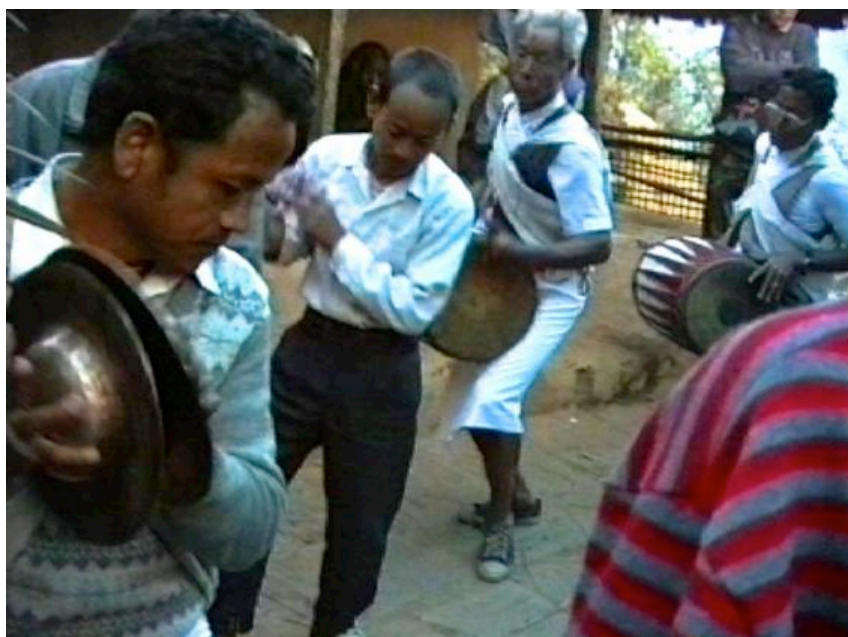
The Thak pachhyu Ujesing in 1969 said:

'Rih tebari (going to find)/Kibari (dancing) iaba' - a 'moh' holding the bamboo container for the 'rih' and the Klehbri and take the food etc. along - then they dance opposite each other and 'moh' is lured slowly nearer till he gives up 'rih' on the carpet - it is to bring 'plah'/'rih' spirit and then it is put in the top of the 'plah'. Then the Klehbri dances round 'plah' 3 times.

Chhyadu 1995

The Thak pachhyu Ujesing in 1969 said:

Then the Pachhyu plays drum and 'chhyadu sheba' (dance) for half an hour to many hours. 'Chhyadu koe' sings a series of songs stressing how good the world is and may it continue to be so (happy etc.) Klehbri at same time are, on washing place, 'Kyal toba' (= same as pachhyu rite of naming ancestors). 'Shon kwe' (= 'A-shon kwe') neva' (= put on) - Klehbri does this - to bless the 'a-syon-Koi' which is put on top of the 'plah' 'morava kwe'.



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641136>

Film

Bhuwansing leads the drummers down the steps and they beat drums and cymbals in front of the 'plah'; drummers and cymbal players circling the 'plah'

IB giving an announcement in Nepali before a further slow circling dance by the men singing - 'chhyadu sheba'; pachhyu in front of the 'plah' reading from a text, telling his beads and blessing the 'plah' while men dance cheerfully around him, singing. Dilmaya's smiling photo on the 'plah' with singers and drummers circling.

Brief shot of Surje standing disconsolately beside the verandah. Men circling with their backs to the 'plah' clockwise, then change direction in a twisting dance, out and in, getting a little faster

Alan dancing with the men; little boy trying to see the camera while drummers move in front of him. Dancers circling, then seen from above, and then beside them until they stop. The 'ala' above the house in the twilight

Sherga 1995



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1642498>

The Sherga or Sherga dance is one of the parts of the long funeral ritual of the Gurungs (pae lava). It can last for many hours, as the spirit of the deceased is taken up to the land of the dead (plah nasa). As we noted in our diary in 1987

‘During the ‘Sherga Sheva’, when the pachhyus sing the soul to ‘plah nasa’, the women (and a few others) slowly circle one way (anti-clockwise) to accompany the soul to the land of the dead. There is then a pause when people stop and sit about and the pachhyus continue to recite - we are then in ‘plah nasa’ - the soul is told about it; for example, that there people sow, reap, and eat grains all in one day. Afterwards one returns to the village and people circle back in reverse direction - the soul having been told to remain there.’

In 1969 the Thak pachhyu, Ujesing, in his description of the whole ritual describes:

'Pachhyu then does 'Sherga seba' - dances and recites. [plah pie, tondhu (drums) pie, choleh (cymbals) pie, tongi (drum) pie, Kusun iame pie, Sherga chaba pie, taie (flowers etc.) pie, Sherga teba [4 hrs], a-syon lemmkomae pie, takwi (again flowers), tsepi lava pie, pargre kie, kiowtaje pie, shimi sava (to escort 'plah'), Sherga chalava pie'.

Pignède, The Gurungs,p.374 describes how:

The next day the third phase begins, during which the pachyu chants 'serka'. This chant continues nearly all the day. During this phase of the 'pae', the pachyu "accompanies" the soul of the deceased towards the land of Kro.

On leaving the house where the 'pae' is taking place, the pachyu precisely indicates all the stages which he "passes over" with the soul of the deceased to arrive at the country where the souls of the ancestors live, then, when it has reached this, the pachyu indicates the stages which he "passes over" on the return road as far as the house of the deceased. Whilst the soul is making for the land of the dead, the pachyus who chant the 'pae' turn anti-clockwise around the 'plah' accompanied by the women, both direct kin and relatives by marriage of the deceased, with their hair falling loose on their shoulders. When the soul arrives at the door of Kro, a javelin is thrown onto a plank of 'timur' wood "to open the door of the land of the dead". "On the return route", the procession turns in a reverse direction, the women plaiting their hair. Mourning is ended. "Once they come back onto the terrace of the dead person's house", those who have made the journey shake themselves so that there is nothing on them that they may have caught on the road leading to Kro.

Film

First part of the Sherga

The 'plah' on the bed outside the house, facing towards the gate.
Girls untwisting cotton threads on the verandah.
Kaji Soba preparing 108 small oil lamps with cotton wool wicks

Women coming out of the house with Durga, and Krishna carrying the bow and arrows. Pachhyu coming out of the house to the beat of

cymbals, the Taprang pachhyu carrying a winnowing tray. Pachhyu and other men circling the 'plah' now draped in orange cloth

Kowshila holding part of a weaving loom and Majina, a sickle circle the 'plah' with other women, holding wands, followed by Bhuwansing, Subana, Krishna with a bow, and the women from Bhuwansing's family. Group seen from the gateway of the terrace circling the 'plah'

Dilmaya's photo on the 'plah', pachhyu changing and circling with others

Kaji Soba sitting in front of 'plah', Alan circling with pachhyu and others

The 'ala' on the roof, 'Sherga seba'. Men singing as they slowly circle in front of the 'plah' anti-clockwise

Prem, Bhuwansing and IB, singing as they circle the 'plah'

Men circling seen from the gate, then close in on Dilmaya's photo on the 'plah' and out to Bhuwansing and up to 'ala'

Klehbri sitting on the bamboo frame making 'kaindu', back to singers and up to 'ala'

The 'ala' down to singers, now in two circles, then to klehbri making 'kaindu'

Man dancing, holding a cockerel, pulls feathers from its neck which he throws at the 'plah'; Pachhyu following with winnowing tray throws handfuls of grain at 'plah'

Pachhyu with feather headdress beating drum, followed by Premkumari and Bishnumaya, circling the 'plah'

Second circle of men

Pachhyu beating drum, followed by Premkumari, Bishnumaya and Sardar

Second part of the Sherga

Men doing the 'Sherga' round the 'plah' while Klehbri sit on their platform chatting; women, including Sarah and Astrid, doing the 'Sherga seba'

Large number of women doing the 'Sherga shebva'. Sarah and Astrid with their heads covered like the other women. Men singing in the 'Sherga' circle, Prem singing. Women - Munmaya, Chokhomaya,

Premkumari, Kowshila - closeup of Premkumari - Bishnumaya, Sardar, Kaji Soba and others. Then Kowshila, Bassur, Sarah and Astrid.

Girls giving flowers, garlands and money to pachhyu; Raila collecting money from women and putting it on a winnowing tray, chatting with Bassur, then Sarah and Astrid put money on tray. Taprang pachhyu, dancing in front of the other pachhyu, Prem behind singing.

Taprang pachhyu leading one group sings and dances with the other group leader alternately. Ujesing has been given a garland of rubbish which he accepts with humour. Ujesing holding an umbrella over his head as a further accoutrement to the garland which causes much mirth. Another man with rubbish.

**THE GURUNG PACHHYU
(SHAMAN)**

Introduction

The Gurungs believe that each person is inhabited by a number of 'souls' (Gg. *plah*); nine for men and seven for women. By far the most common cause of serious illness, particularly of long-term illness, is thought to be because one or more of these 'souls' have wandered off, or been captured by evil spirits or witches (a witch=*bokshi* [Nep.], or *pum/pumshaw* (Gg. male/female)). Another frequent cause of illness, not involving loss of *plah*, is a direct attack by some malignant force. In all such cases the ritual healing treatment is performed by a specialist; Lama, Brahman, dhami, or as in 90% of the cases in--Thak, the pachhyu. In some Gurung villages, especially where there is a resident Lama and no pachhyu, the situation is not as monopolistic as in Thak. But since we only witnessed the system in Thak in any detail, it will be the work of the pachhyu that is described here.

The variation from village to village may be seen by comparing the villages of Mohoriya and Thak. Pignède described how the lower castes in Mohoriya did not employ lamas, pachhyu, and Klehbri, the Gurung 'ritual experts. I confirmed this during my visit to Mohoriya, though pachhyus did say powerful mantras (spells) for the service castes. But in Thak the pachhyu frequently performs- rites in lower caste houses in exactly the same manner as in Gurung ones. It does seem, however, that lower I caste households in Thak also employ dhami, or people who become possessed -with a spirit when a drum is beaten. In the one description of such a session that I was able to obtain, two people became possessed and acted like an animal. They sniffed round those present to determine who the witch was. Other parts of the rite, for instance the making of small images, appear to have been very similar to those of the Gurung *pachhyu*.

The *pachhyu* can employ a wide range of diagnostic techniques when he is consulted about an illness. He will judge partly from the nature of the illness. Blindness, sleeplessness, a temperature, all are signs that evil spirits termed *bhuts* and *prets* have been at work. If one talks to oneself, keeps alternating between sickness and health, then an ancestor is probably responsible. Scabs are usually caused by godlings (*deowta*), while cuts that do not heal are the work of witches. But since the same symptom may be caused

by totally different agents, for example defective vision, temperature and loss of consciousness may be caused by godlings or evil *masan*, it is necessary to go beyond a naïve reliance on symptoms. Almost always the *pachhyu* feels the pulse of the sick individual. By flexing the various fingers and seeing how they affect the pulse, he can sometimes tell which type of supernatural power is responsible for the illness, or whether it is merely a “natural” disease. In some cases this is supplemented by reading the hand, or in Thak the finger joints, of the patient.

This examination of what are known as the *parga* helps to decide whether a person is in an inauspicious year, or whether his nativity clashes with that of any other members of the family, a situation which could well lead to the illness. Another method of divination is to draw a diagram with three wavy lines. The number of squiggles is random, and from counting them in a certain way a set of numbers emerges from which the *pachhyu* may calculate the cause of illness. This is one of the many varieties of the *mut* (or *mhud* Nep. ? =opinion or vote) *moba* technique. Another is to draw a diagram with twelve divisions and then to get the patient to place a grain of rice in one of these. Depending on which he chooses, the *pachhyu* can diagnose his illness. The actual calculations and variety of divination systems are almost endless and allow for enormous flexibility.

To judge from the actual rituals performed, we may classify the types of cause of disease as follows. Firstly there is a category of ‘natural’ causation, for example when a person eats dirty or decaying food and then has a stomach ache. This is not within the province of the *pachhyu* and he may recommend people to go to the local hospital for treatment. Secondly there are *deowta* or godlings, peeved at being neglected. Thirdly there are the spirits of ancestors, *bayo* (Nep. = *bayu*, wind or spirit of the dead). Fourthly there are witches, male and female. Fifthly there are the snake gods, *nag* (or *lhu*) and, possibly, the godlings that dwell in houses (*lha*). Sixthly, there are various types of evil spirit – *bhut*, *pret*, *moh*, *masan* each of which has its special characteristics. Seventhly, there are forest and field spirits, the former being the more powerful, small human-shaped creates called *banketa*. Finally, there are the forces, related to the year and date- of birth and the present *parga* of the patient and his household.

Each of the above entails a specific set of rituals which may be used to counter its power. Thus symptoms are not classified by the

part of the body they affect, or their intensity, but by the type of agent supposed to have caused them. I collected detailed information concerning 43 rituals, most of them to ward off sickness, and all used by the *pachhyu*. Many of them last over an hour and are complex symbolic performances, probably dating back to the old bon-religion of pre-Buddhist Tibet. The central principle of many of them is to attract down the evil spirit, or wandering soul of the sick person, feed it with blood and other foodstuffs, and thus, to make it happy or drive it out. Often the rite is extremely dramatic and enacts the expulsion of evil and suffering. The rites are also graduated. If a simpler and less expensive one does not work, it may be worth trying a more elaborate one in which, for example, a goat is sacrificed instead of a chicken. One example of such a rite may help to give substance to this brief summary.

[Alan Macfarlane in *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf (New Delhi, 1981)]

The Moshi Theba

The 'Moshi Theba' in Namru village – February 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647336>

Notes

Yarjung had been chanting 'pe' since early morning on his own. A certain number of 'pe' have to be done. With three pachhyus they can each chant a different 'pe' at the same time, so cutting the amount of work one does by a third.

Reading from 'pe' - in front of whom, double ended bell. Front right - dish of rice, leaves, 2 sticks, small wooden pot. To left - saucepan with charcoal burning - incense. In front - small upturned basket with a bow tied to the top, bow-string uppermost. This he beats with a stick as he chants. On top of bow is a piece of paper with the dead woman's name on. Right - a pair of cymbals. Next row left - pot of water, dead 'ghyan kudu', jungle cock, pierced through its nose with of the wooden spikes with peel on; large basket full of pheasant feathers, and two bamboo poles with a paper with a drawing affixed to each pole and rolled inwards on each pole. Right - dish of doughnut rings. Far right, another flask - of water? Next left - dish of rice with a 20rs note on it, then basket of millet with the hornbill head, and pointed had with three cowries like shamrock ('railbo'), and porcupine quills. Back left - a small bundle of 108 types of twig tied together. Back, opposite pachhyu, thick bamboo post tied to another wooden post stuck in the ground, from which hang two bottles of 'pa', two tangerines, an apple, a banana, two small baskets with doughnuts and rice rings - at top, bundle of leaves and flowers, another small basket and a piece of white muslin. Below the bow are long, thin sticks with tangerine peel, pieces of apple, lumps of fried omelette, spiked at the end. Very thin sticks have small pieces of puffed rice spiked on them. Two large leaves like those used for rain-shields are tied to the top of the bow frame. Bow string appears to be plastic-covered wire. Back left - kitchen tripod with earthenware pot on top, and brass pot underneath. Back centre - bag of grain.

'Mohmae' helpers - five of them. Collect the necessary things, etc. 108 types of wood. The incense is a mixture of nine types of herbs - 'suri' - come from Dhud Pokhari. Name of dead woman Asurpi(maa) - suffix 'maa' dead woman, 'ke', dead man. This woman was ill for a long time before death, so Mosi Tiba has to be done before Pae lava - a bad death. Here are five pachhyu in all - all area pachhyu. 5.30pm. Start to prepare 'ala' - call down all

relatives of dead person to come and remember her. Yarjung's cousin, Maila, puts on Yarjung's feather headdress, hat and belt. He will be doing the whole 'Pae' and Yarjung will have to go back to Pokhara as his wife is to have an operation. 'Chew sona' - Names of millet donors listed and their names given in prayers to bring good luck. Set up frame to hang chicken from, the 'moh di' (ghost's house). Ghost has "eaten" the soul of the dead woman. Ghost with dead woman's soul goes into the cock, then separate the ghost from the soul of the dead person, then send the soul of the dead person to heaven. Cock on frame, hanging by leg. When it shakes, soul has entered - goat killed, egg thrown at cock, cock killed. Beside frame, plates of rice rings, etc. as offerings.

It was getting dark by now. They managed to find two pressure lamps which they hung under the awning. The other pachhyus had joined Yarjung and his uncle, who will continue the 'pae', put on the feather headdress and accoutrements. They began chanting and drumming on the single-sided drums. A frame was constructed to hang the chicken from. At a certain point, one was hung by its leg from the frame. Chanting continued, drumming continued, the chicken, left suspended, began to shake. At that moment, a goat's head was chopped off, the chicken's throat cut, a gun fired, and an egg thrown at the chicken. This is done for the ghost to enter the chicken. When the chicken is killed, the ghost is there before the pachhyus. They begin to tussle and fight with the ghost to control it, banging their drums, shaking and writhing, clearly expending much energy in what can be a fight to death. Pachhyus have been known to die if the mantras they are muttering all the while are not strong enough, positive proof of Yarjung's contention that to give away one's mantra was to weaken it, which would ultimately be disastrous for the pachhyu himself. Luckily the ghost was captured.

Then they have to separate the soul from the ghost. A banana stem has a string tied through it, drumming and chanting begins again and goes on for a long time. Then at a certain signal the banana stem is cut with a khukri. If the string is not cut cleanly through, the ghost has won, and the soul is still in its possession, and the 'pae' cannot be done. Again, the banana stem and string were cut right through. Then the ghost must be destroyed. Above the pachhyu's paraphernalia (as described in Notebook II) there are two bamboos with a picture of a spirit suspended between them. The pachhyus go out of the village, build a fire and dig a

hole beside it. The frame that had held the chicken is broken up and thrown away. A plough that has been covered in blood from the goat and chicken is buried in the hole. A pot of mustard oil is burnt on the fire. Then with a ladle tied to a long bamboo, a pachhyu first circles the fire with the ladle containing 'raksi', then tips the 'raksi' into the boiling oil. Immense flames shoot up. This is done three times, and the picture of the ghost, held above on the bamboos is consumed. Then the pot of oil is tipped into the hole, and the hole quickly filled in. That is the conclusion of the 'Mosi tiba', and now the 'pae' can get underway.

Yarjung said that during the Moshi Theba the pachhyus are possessed by the god Pakre, and shake ('tarava') - we saw and filmed this. They recite the 'Pakre Kleh son di pre son di'. This is done when fighting the ghost after it has come down to the chicken. The god Pakre lives on a hill/mountain which is in between the high, slightly snow-capped middle range of hills and Annapurna itself. When they are possessed they see the witches. He would like to make a sketch of their shape, but is unable to remember enough detail.

Many people think that the beating of the little drums ('tondhu' and 'tonda') at the start of the Pae is just to call people. This is an error. The various rhythms played by the pachhyus at the start are very important - each different rhythm having a different meaning, but in essence then send a message up to the village of the spirits ('plah nasa') summoning down the spirit of the dead person into the 'a-la'. The only other occasion on which these drums can be played is at a Moshi Theba - ie. they are specifically associated with summoning down dead persons. So powerful is the rhythm and invocation that it must never be practised or used on other occasions. Thus a pachhyu has to learn the rhythms only by participating in these occasions. If he practised on other occasions, he would accidentally summon down a dead spirit which would come to the village and kill someone.

Moshi Theba in Ianjacote November 1994



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647202>

Note

This Moshi Theba held in Ianjacote, proceeded alongside the start of the formal memorial ritual (pae lava). The deceased was believed to have died in an unfortunate way and consequently this ritual to bring back the missing soul was performed.

Film

Men building the temporary "house" for the 'pae'
Yarjung hanging up his drums
Yarjung setting out his paraphernalia with the help of the trainee pachhyu
Making a small 'ala' to stand inside the shelter
Trainee pachhyu preparing the clay pot for the 'mosi tiba' fire
Tying flowers above the 'ala'. Yarjung tying a bunch of green stems together, then to the bow
Man weaving a small offering's basket
Yarjung putting out further paraphernalia. Clay pot on tripod above another brass pot. Basket with offerings tied above 'ala'.

Man ties further offering to 'ala'. Pachhyus chanting together,
including Yarjung
Sprinkling a goat with water in preparation for its sacrifice
Yarjung greeting the 'moh' with 'pa' and 'keihn' when they reach
the village
The beginning of the 'pae' (memorial ritual) with the first
drummings
Blessing the drums by giving them food
Yarjung greeting the Klehbri with 'pa'
Offerings on winnowing trays
Making the main 'ala', the first blow to the bamboo indicated by a
drum beat. Making a small fire outside. Women watching the
making of the 'ala' then start the ritual keening. Putting up the
'ala'. Yarjung with a flaming pressure lamp

'Dobato waba' (low light)

The frame broken up and the small 'ala' dismantled prior to
burning
drums and cymbals, Yarjung chanting
Making a fire to burn frame, plough and small 'ala'
By then it is raining and one man is covered in a rain shield
(shyaku)
Making a hole with a crowbar and 'kodale' beside the fire
Earthenware pot with oil in it put on the fire
Drawing of evil image held above fire
Ladle full of strong 'pa' circled round pot then poured into oil with
much yodeling and then burst of flame
Second and third fire burst when evil image is consumed then pot
pushed into the hole and buried
Pachhyus paraphernalia used for 'Mosi tiba', including bow etc.
removed

Phi Ngai Sainba – Pokhara – 7 May 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641171>

A rite which the pachhyu at Thak performed more than half a dozen times during 1968 was the *phi ngai sainba*. It is performed against all kinds of evil agents. It takes over ten hours and occurs at night, starting at about six in the evening. Throughout the rite the pachhyu recites a series of *pie* or myths which accompany and give power to each ritual action. The rite takes place- within the patient's house, until towards the end when the pachhyu proceeds to a nearby hillock. The pachhyu makes a number of *kaindu* (little rice figures) which represent gods, and others of millet representing evil spirits. Pebbles, sand and water are specially brought from the place by the river where bodies are burnt, and four metal loop-shaped tacks and an arrow are also collected together. Likewise a variety of special pieces of wood and a goat (of any size) are brought. The pachhyu starts the ritual in his ordinary clothes, but later dons a special belt and head-piece which are supposed to frighten away evil spirits. He sits on a rain shield (*syakhu*). Having put the *kaindu* on a rice mat he sprinkles them with ash, and likewise sprinkles himself, the patient, and a

patch of ground across the doorway. Then he starts to recite, accompanying himself at intervals on a drum.

Meanwhile water has been heating on the fire. The light is then extinguished and, it is believed, the *rih* (evil spirit) enters. The sick person has been partially covered by a carrying basket and the pachhyu then throws spoonfuls of very hot water and handfuls of the cremation dust at him. All the time the pachhyu is reciting and, at intervals, blowing his horn. This goes on for up to an hour and the family and neighbours sit huddled in the dark. Then the sick person is stroked with a coin, which is believed to suck out the evil *graha* (luck/ fortune) and the coin is immersed in a pan of boiling water. The pachhyu next draws a triangle in the earth and puts the patient on his sitting mat in the centre of it. Now millet flour is thrown at the patient through a flame, so that it sparks, and fizzes and he jumps about in mock (and sometimes real) pain. The *kaindu* of the evil spirit is circled round the patient's neck nine or seven times (depending on sex) and is then stroked against the patient. Then the ash at the door is examined for footprints; if those of a chicken, centipede, human, buffalo or other animal appear it indicates what evil spirit was involved (the door is kept closed during the proceedings). And so the ritual goes on. We have only reached half way but a full description and analysis must await another publication. Later a goat is sacrificed, the pachhyu rushes into the house with the head of the goat in his teeth, a lighted arrow is shot off into the darkness. Each act is a symbol and many of the minor actions have been left out of this account. Clearly the audience do not have much idea about what all the actions mean, and do not understand the drone of words that accompanies them all. The main drama of the luring and forceful expulsion of evil is obvious to all, however.

[Alan Macfarlane in *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective*, edited by Christoph von Fürer Haimendorf (New Delhi, 1981)]

Notes

We then took a taxi to Sainik, a village along the Kathmandu road. There are 315 persons in this village, most of them Gurung. The house belonged to Buktobahadur, an Indian Army man, waiting for promotion to Jamdar. He is suffering from a chest

complaint and depression. That's why he's doing the 'Phi Ngai sainba'. His house had three rooms, built of stone with breeze block partitions, and a corrugated iron roof supported on bamboo poles. It had electricity so Alan could film quite well. With Yarjung were two young Syanja pachhyus who were trying to learn from Yarjung.

Firstly the 'kaidu' are made - large balls of rice formed, then with speed converted into cones with hollow bottoms, heads coated with water and 'chyugu'. These represent gods - eight in all - and a "castle". One centrepiece is tri-sided and grooved, larger than the rest. All are dressed at the top with a leaf, the centrepiece with three leaves, the "castle" with four. Cones = 'ringio tsorbe wei'; castle = 'pruju kwero' (the points represent N., S., E. and W.), centrepiece = 'change karuwe we'; leaves = 'fwe ru ru'. Further 'kaidu' are made from 'nare paihngo'. These represent evil spirits. The former are placed on a 'nowli' (winnowing tray). The later, on a tin dish. One looks distinctly like a fox with breasts - called 'rhi kaidu' (female 'kaidu'). There are four small cones and a small "castle".

The pachhyu sits on a 'kguhn' with a 'gundri' and rug on top. The 'nare kaidu' are covered with a cloth. There are baskets of 'mlha' (unhusked rice) into which the pachhyu's feather headdress is stuck. In another bowl of 'mlha', are the pachhyu's porcupine quills in a pointed holder, his head, and bird's beak. His cymbals and belt with bells, also a tiny set of agricultural implements in a bag are on the 'nowli'. There is also a bell, conch shell, and bag with nine pachhyu herbs which he sprinkles on the charcoal from the fire at intervals to give 'dhup'. There are two trays of husked rice with money and flowers on. There is also a bottle of water - 'ulto sulto kew' (upside-down water?).

Yarjung began the opening 'pye' about 9.00pm. Prior to this he'd unwound some cotton thread which he'd given to a man to dip in turmeric. Another person had made a bow and arrow. It was very hot in the room with about 35 people squashed in, including us. A small vase of flowers was put on the 'nowli'. The arrow had a long wick attached to light subsequently and was stuck in one of the baskets of rice with the feathers. Yarjung has his father's beads as well as his own. At the start, he held all their beads (his and the students') over the 'dhup' and began to chant. Yarjung, hatless, mutters a mantra ('noh'), returns the beads to the students who put them on, as he does, after circling them round

their heads and blowing on them. His father's beads are put on the central 'kaidu'.

Yarjung puts on his 'kule', greets all the main guests, then starts the 'pe'. First seems to list the pachhyu ancestors. From time to time he flicks rice over the 'kaidu'. Then he mumbles a mantra, and puts ash on the faces and under the chins of the students and himself. His 'ngah' (drum) is brought, the skin having been tautened over the fire. Yarjung holds the 'ngah' with the quills inside the drum. He circles the 'ngah' with a dish of 'dhup', takes up the conch and rubs it on the drum skin. A student rubs the cymbals together, Yarjung muttering. He puts down the conch and begins to beat the drum. The students play the cymbals and bell, another man blows the conch. As Yarjung's father wrote down so many of the 'pye' for Yarjung, the students can often follow them as Yarjung chants. This is exceptional, of course.

The first 'pye' describes the origin of things used in the 'teihn': 1. 'Kaidu pye'; 2. 'kgunh pye'; 3. 'nowli pye'; 4. 'tolo pye' (basket of 'mlha'); 5. 'ta pye' (feathers); 6. 'chew pye' ('mlha'). 7. 'ralbo pye' (pachhyu's hat); 8. 'rale pye' (cymbals); 9. 'larama pye' (beak); 10. 'sarochaw pye' (porcupine quills). 11. 'ladashi pye' (husked rice); 12. 'ri kaidu pye' (evil 'nare' "foxy" female). Next is the 'Popo pochuron pye'. The subject is wrapped in a cloth and bends over the 'dhup', the cloth covering him completely, and inhales. This is the 'pe mae huba', the 'mae' being the nine herbs. This (the 'pingne sheva') is not only done in cases of sickness but for other occasions too, though rarely, and no one can afford the goat needed, it costs too much.

The next 'pye' is 'aba polu pye'. The subject still sits draped in the cloth. Yarjung explains the story as a student chants. Noting the faces of the audience, Yarjung is a good story-teller. Next, the 'mukiba pye' - about a giant who eats his parents and other children - is observed - turned out, and wanders. He is the origin of evil spirits. Yarjung says to the audience, "This is in 'chonkwi', and you don't really understand". They agree. He compares various 'chonkwi' words with modern Gurung. Yarjung drinks 'pa' from an old wood and silver cup. The subject again inhales under the cloth - the 'pye' seems to refer to illness - "If you have a headache, if you have a cold....".

Next the floor is brushed by the front door, and the door partly shut. (At this time, anyone who is a witch is expected to leave. I

think it was only coincidental that all the women got up at this time and trooped outside to pee). Yarjung takes up his feather headdress, hat, bells, quills, and conch on his lap and says a mantra over them, touching his forehead with a hank of hair hanging from the hat, and swishing it in front of his face. He uncovers the evil 'nare kaidu' and 'rhi kaidu' is put by the door in the ash. Yarjung puts on his hat with hair dangling. It has two small horns and cowrie shells at the top. He puts on a woman's 'pro' and another belt with bells hanging from it. Then he puts on his feather headdress. He circles the 'kaidu' with 'dhup', the porcupine quills resting against the largest 'kaidu'. Begins to beat the drum. He gives rice to the students to sprinkle. Insects and beetles moving through the ash has made it more difficult.

The subject sits, the lights go off, the conch is blown. Notice that the drumming has become uneven and more frantic, and deduce that Yarjung must be 'tarava'. In the darkness, the low hum of voices sound strangely ethereal under the persistent drum, cymbals and bell. When the drumming stops, the lights are tuned on and the ash examined for "footprints". Yarjung decides that a cat has come in. Yarjung draws circles in a dish of 'nare' with the quill holder, and hands it to a man who throws handfuls of it round the house, inside and out, to the insistent beat of the drum. He then "walks" the 'rhi kaidu' along the "track" taken through the ash. He crouches over the ash, and to the sound of drum, cymbals and bell, throws 'nare' at the 'rhi kaidu' and knocks it over. Then he sweeps the floor of ash and 'nare'.

A goat is brought in and its head washed. Yarjung lights a leaf. The subject circles the goat's head with this, then his own. He then pours water on the goat's head and along its spine four times. The goat shakes before the subject repeats the action again. The goat is taken outside and killed. Four pieces of wood are put on the 'nowli' and a dish of goat's blood, 'ko piri'. The two students have by now fallen asleep, one resting his head on Yarjung's knee. The four 'nare' cones are taken out and placed N., S., E. and W. after circling the subject's head with them. The helper circles the subject's head, following the circling movement Yarjung is making at the same time the 'ngah'. He then goes outside and throws each of the 'kaidu' of over the house roof.

The goat's head with skin and legs attached is brought in. The subject "feeds" the head with water. Then the liver is examined - 'woita tin nghyonba'. Yarjung points out the village, a hill, road

and house - the indications are that the house is not protected, and they must do another 'teihn' - the 'yo kuba'. Yarjung asks the N., S., E. and W. directions. He puts a piece of wood through the remaining 'nare' "castle" and puts it on the 'nowli'. The student pachhyu starts playing the 'ngah', the bow is made ready for firing. Chanting, and holding the porcupine quills, Yarjung puts ash on his fingers and round his wrists, crosses himself, and rolls the quills between his hands. He gets up, circles the 'kaidu', etc., rubbing quills as before over the goat's head, talking to it. He then puts the quill holder into the goat's mouth, circling, then takes it out again. Then Yarjung picks up the goat's head in his mouth, teeth to teeth, and carries it round the room, skin and legs trailing, beating the 'ngah' himself now. People yodel. A man follows with a bundle of sticks, and another with the bow. They circle the subject with the skin and legs of the goat. The conch is blown. Yarjung goes out of the back door, drops the skin on the ground, and stands with one foot on the head, the other on the tail. The bundle of twigs is lit as a flare and they troop into the maize field beyond the back yard.

The subject crouches - conch blown. The quills are stuck in the holder in the earth. The end of the arrow is lit (the wick). Yarjung circles himself with the arrow, and between his legs and round the bow, and then round the subject and over the quills. Then he fires the arrow over the field to much yodelling - 'me tahli' (arrow and bow). Back in the house, Yarjung takes a gold coin (there should be four, but they only have one) . He then puts the quill holder in the end of a bottle of water and stirs. Then he jabs the spike of the quill holder into the floor. Yarjung starts to drum alone. The helper circles the head of the subject with the coin, does outside, comes back four times. Each time he has dipped the coin into boiling water. Yarjung takes a bunch of twigs and ties them together. He sticks the quill holder in his belt.

By now, most of the women and children have curled up on the floor and are sleeping. The subject is draped in an eiderdown cover having removed his shirt. In the kitchen, the subject crouches. Yarjung dips the bunch of leaves into the boiling water and flicks it at the subject. He then lights a flame and flicks sparks and flaming millet over the subject a number of times. He then does the water flicking again and throws the bunch of leaves over the subject's head.

Back in the main room, Yarjung takes off his father's headdress, hat, belt and 'pro'. He starts drumming again. The helper prepares to put string round the subject's neck. Yarjung stands up, drumming. The string is tied round the subject's neck. The 'kaidu' with the stick through it is put in a hole above the front door. Yarjung blows and says a mantra over the 'charpuu si', the four small pieces of wood alluded to before, and metal staples which are hammered into the door frames and the plough. The 'rhi kaidu' is put in a hole dug at the gate (outside) to the house, with the plough, the later only just showing. All the 'kaidu' were knocked down except for the central one - 'ngay kaidu'. The central 'kaidu' is circled with 'dhup'. Two women came in with strings which were also put round the subject's neck, saying "Shyai, shyai". String is also put round his wife's neck. Finally, the central 'kaidu' is knocked down with a sweep of the 'ngah', and the 'teh' is over.

It was 5am. when it ended, and we all ate a little 'kaidu'. The rest ate some goat, but we had potatoes. In all, Yarjung earned 105rs. and a 'pathi' of 'mlha' which he had to share with his assistant (not the students), and a little of the 'kaidu'.

Film

Yarjung and two trainee pachhyus from Syanja, kneading balls of rice. Shaping balls into cones.

Transferring cones onto another small tray. Kneading balls of rice.

Forming a ridged pyramid shape. Placing other cones with pyramid.

Sticking leaves into cones

Yarjung rolls 'nare' (cooked millet) between his hands. Forming the 'ri kaidu' (looks like an animal with large ears)

Yarjung sits on mat. Covers 'nare kaidu' with black cloth.

The rice 'kaidu' are all set out on a winnowing tray in front of him with cones surrounding the pyramid shape. Preparing hat with feathers.

Preparing paraphernalia.

Yarjung takes little metal models of agricultural implements out of pouch, checks them and puts them back in pouch.

Places pouch on tray with cones.

Placing bottle of 'pa' near tray with 'kaidu'. Yarjung ties knots in string.

Trainee pachhyus sitting beside him

Yarjung testing bow string

The beads belonging to his father are put on the largest 'kaidu'

Audience. Yarjung occasionally flicks rice over 'kaidu'

Yarjung holds incense burner and passes it over drum three times.
 Passes conch shell over drum muttering a mantra. A man blows conch
 and Yarjung starts drumming, trainees beat cymbals and ring bell
 People watching. Trainees reading Yarjung's texts. Sarah watching
 Yarjung starts drumming and chanting another 'pe'. Child asleep.
 People watching
 Woman drinking from brass pot
 Subject in blanket moves in front of 'kaidu', touches forehead to ground
 to inhale incense, then Yarjung begins drumming and chanting. Subject
 remains crouching under blanket
 Little dish of incense smoking in front of subject
 Old man listening
 Subject under blanket on the floor, Yarjung drumming and chanting
 Yarjung instructs helper to sweep the floor by the front door. Sprinkling
 ash by the front door
 'Ri kaidu' placed before the front door by torch-light.
 Light on - 'Ri kaidu' standing before the front door.
 Yarjung puts on special hat decorated with cowrie shells and two small
 horns.
 Yarjung putting on his belt.
 Yarjung putting on his feather head-dress.
 Yarjung passes dish of incense over 'kaidu'.
 Yarjung drumming and chanting.
 Row of men sitting against wall, watching. Women watching on the
 other side of the room
 Yarjung 'tarava' - drum beating faster, more erratic, shouting. Drum
 beat, rhythm slow and regular, then stops
 Light on - men looking for signs of entry in the ash around the 'ri kaidu'.
 Yarjung 'drawing' with point of porcupine quill holder in dish of 'nare'
 and saying mantra, then gives dish to his helper
 Drumming, chanting, helper throws handfuls of 'nare' towards the door.
 He gets another dishful and throws handfuls over the audience. Sarah
 smiling
 Helper presses the 'ri kaidu' on prints when identified
 Leaf passed over the back of the goat by the subject three times.
 Subject circles his own head with the leaf, then trickles water along the
 goat's back four times and circles his own head, the goat must shake
 each time.
 Yarjung chanting all the while. (After this the goat is killed outside).
 Yarjung puts the arrow in his basket of millet. Yarjung pours some oil
 into paper and puts it onto the winnowing tray beside the 'kaidu'
 The four 'nare kaidu' are taken by the helper and placed at the four
 cardinal points outside, after having circled the subject's head with them
 clockwise, then anticlockwise. Goat skin with head still attached and

looking upwards placed in front of the 'kaidu'. Helper comes outside and
 throws something (a 'ri kaidu'?) up over the roof
 Yarjung examines the goat's liver and pronounces on it. Looking down
 at the goat's face.
 Sarah watching. Drumming faster. Goat's head in low foreground in
 front of Yarjung drumming and chanting
 Yarjung circles his wrists with the porcupine quills, crosses himself, puts
 ash on forehead, throws 'nare' behind him.
 Yarjung begins to roll the porcupine quills between his hands, gets up
 and walks round the 'kaidu', chanting.
 Yarjung rolls the porcupine quills between his hands over the upturned
 head of the goat. Yarjung with goat's head in his mouth, circling the
 head of the subject with the rest of the skin.
 A trainee pachhyu beside him carrying bow and arrow.
 Yarjung drumming again, goat's head still in his mouth, again circles
 the subject's head with the skin. Cymbals beater and trainee pachhyu
 with bow and arrow follow him.
 Yarjung holding the porcupine quills and drum in left hand.
 Yarjung moves outside still carrying the goat in his mouth - conch,
 cymbals, bell, shouting and whistling
 Much noise - drumming, cymbals and conch
 Burning arrow passed through Yarjung's legs then around subject sitting
 nearby. Burning arrow passed over and around the porcupine quills,
 then fired into night by Yarjung with much yodelling
 Yarjung drumming and chanting again.
 Judy and other people sitting on mats on floor, or rolled up in blankets
 sleeping. Helper standing passes gold coin over subject's head.
 Repeats, circling coin clockwise then anticlockwise and walks out of
 room to kitchen. Kitchen fire with cooking pot for boiling water
 Row of people sleeping wrapped in blankets.
 Yarjung, in kitchen, hits subject in sheet with bunch of leaves dipped in
 boiling water. Judy and older woman wrapped in shawl with back
 turned to subject. Subject, as Yarjung hits him
 Yarjung hits subject with bunch of leaves, then he stands up and walks
 off
 Yarjung packing up his hat and feathers then his belt. Takes off his 'pro'
 Cock perched on basket inside the house, crowing. Yarjung starts
 drumming and chanting again. Sarah wrapped in shawl, laughing
 Old man sitting beside her talking to another man
 Yarjung standing up and drumming, subject sitting with helper
 opposite. Beats drum fast and helper ties string round neck of subject,
 others come to touch him. Drum rhythm slows and stops.
 Yarjung saying mantra over staples for hammering in door and window
 frames, then passes them to helper

Hammering staple into door post
'Kaidu' laying on their sides
Man walks through room holding the 'ri kaidu'
Two men walk into dark
Dawn, dark hills with sky lightening
Dawn, silhouetted banana trees
Yarjung drumming and chanting, to people standing
Yarjung drumming inside house
Yarjung drumming, to front of house with sky lightening, to hills
Dawn, dark hills and red sky
Woman sitting in doorway, to front of house with hills behind
Hills at dawn, pan to house
Tarmac road, electricity lines, to house with hills behind
House
Truck coming down road, to house
Cutting up rice 'kaidu' to eat
Children eating
Man passes bowl and rice to boys next to him
Yarjung eating, Sarah eating, other people eating
Men eating, to girl eating

Dhin bar lava – 1991



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647186>

Although the second half of the film is very dark, the earlier part is particularly interesting and the whole ritual so important that it has been decided to include this performance of the ritual. The aim is to protect the house (di).

Notes

After supper, we went up again to watch the main part of the ritual, the same as we'd seen Yarjung do in the 'Moshi Theba'. A chicken was suspended from a bamboo frame by one leg. When it shook, its throat was cut, and egg thrown at it, a gun fired, and a goat's throat cut. The blood from the goat was sprinkled of four plough shares which would later be set up at strategic points near each of their houses to ward off witches. It began to rain, and lightning lit up the mountains. They lifted a flagstone on the platform in front of the hut and lit a fire there. They had to cover the area by extending the roof of the hut. Even so, the rain was heavy enough to nearly quench it. They had to cut large wood to feed it. The schoolmaster had drawn a picture of an evil spirit,

and the paper was stuck at the end of an eight-foot bamboo above the fire. They had to remove it during the rain, but luckily it eased off enough for the final part, where 'pa' is poured from a large spoon at the end of a stick, into a pot of boiling oil. The exploding flames leap up, and hopefully, consume the picture. Everyone had retreated to the verandah, so the scrum was acute. Alan managed to film much of this thanks to a pressure lamp strategically placed opposite the mouth of the tent.

Film

'Pachhyu kaila', Budibahadur, and Gomansing under temporary shelter

Netrabadurur, Bolbahadur, Budibahadur pachhyu beating on bow, and Surje

Bolbahadur, Budibahadur pachhyu beating on bow, and Surje

Bimbahadur setting out three ploughs with goat beside them

Bamboo frame with chicken hanging from it

Men sacrificing goat

Sprinkling the ploughs with goat's blood

Pachhyu's assistants circling goat over heads of the families of House32 and House91

while the pachhyu chants

Night.

Chicken attached to frame and crowd waiting for it to shake

Chicken shakes, flash of gunfire and much drumming
frame broken

Examining liver of the goat by the light of a pressure lamp

Oil being heated on fire while pachhyu and others prepare long
ladle

then 'pa' poured into the oil with explodes several times

Oil pot taken off the fire

People smearing themselves with oil at end of the ritual

Phailu or ancestor ritual

A Phailu is an annual ritual done to ancestor spirits which only certain families (with links to the pachhyu) have in their houses.

*

We talked about the 'Phailu' to Durga Gurung. We had found that very few people have shrines in Pokhara, but a number have them in their villages, including Durga's house. The 'Phailu' appears to be done now by Lamme and Pachhyumae [priestly] households, but rarely by others, and never by the members of the 'Four clans'. The shrine is for the 'khul deota' - the ancestors of the family. The male ancestors are called 'ke', the female, 'ma'.

In conversation with Indrabahadur Gurung, we were told that the Kul Deota [household gods] were worshipped on Baisakh Purnima in the Bayo puja. They were in the jungle. There were two varieties. Those who do not eat buffalo (pachhyu) have a special god in the house to whom they do a Phailu (pachhyu does). Ordinary people do have a 'la-di' (la = leaf), and hold the La Tiba which can be done at any time. The 'la' consists of an egg, some fried, unhusked rice ('la- wa'), pure water into which silver and gold have been dipped; these may be kept in the house or the fields in a leaf. Nobody from outside can touch. Every house should have one. IB has one in Pokhara and one in the village. Whenever one performs a puja to ancestors - should do it twice a year, but some people only do it once a year, or only do it every 2-3 years. When a person is added, a new bundle as above is added, and the ancestors' names recited. When a person in the house dies, the old bundle is thrown away and one starts again. IB now has a bundle of four ancestors in his house in Pokhara.

Phailu 2nd March 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1672382>

Notes

Left for Thak at 10.30am. and arrived at about 3.30pm. Found the Taprang pachhyu in the house. They were doing a 'Phailu', a rite only done in pachhyu's houses for the 'failu', the household god. Dilmaya cooking a vast pot of rice to make the 'kaidu'. Alan filming, though very dark.

Alan began to film the 'Phailu' immediately. It was still at the rice-cooking stage so had really only just begun. Watched until after supper, at about 8.00pm. Until then, mainly reciting 'pe'. Felt very tired, but decided to get up later when the real work starts. Drumming, and the squawk of a chicken woke us at 12.30am. We were in time to see the chicken killed, and its blood sprinkled on the 'kaidu', and the heart and liver checked for malformations which would indicate negative results. All well though. The drumming became more serious. Atasing played it first, then the cymbals. Tejbahadur killed the chicken.

Film

Dilmaya beside fire, pachhyu on the other side with large decorated 'kaidu' in front of him
Pachhyu chanting 'pe' various 'kaidu' in front of him
Dilmaya and Surje on other side of fire, also Chokhomaya and daughter, then Premkumari on Surje's lap
Pachhyu naming members of the family, Surje placing lighted joss sticks round 'kaidu'
Premkumari sitting on Dilmaya's lap blinking at Alan; pachhyu shows cymbals and then warms 'ngah'; Dilmaya eating rice while Premkumari nestles in Surje's lap
Pachhyu beating cymbals, another man drumming, and another holding chicken which is then sacrificed
Women visitors including Kowshila, Towchiri, and Budikumari
Pachhyu examining the chicken liver and finding it good
chatting with the women
Pachhyu whispering a 'mantra'
Rubbing porcupine quills, putting on his special cap, taking bits of rice from the 'kaidu' and throwing them away from him, blowing the conch shell into his 'ngah', then beats drum while another beats the cymbals, and starts to chant
Pachhyu's drumming becomes a little more vigorous
women wave strips of bamboo with loops at the end over towards the pachhyu; drum crescendo
Change of drum rhythm
women still waving strips, repeat of earlier crescendo with drum
Waving bundles of lighted joss sticks over the large 'kaidu'
pachhyu drumming, then Surje becomes possessed ('tarava'); man wearing pachhyu's cap circles the 'kaidu' with praying motion, Surje still shaking; more vigorous movement of everyone, women shaking bamboo strips or 'ashee'; at the end of the drumming
Surje still 'tarava' and they try to stop him by putting 'dhup' under his nose
Slower drum rhythm, the 'kaidu' is picked up on a winnowing tray and swung gently
pachhyu throws little pieces of rice from 'kaidu', drum and cymbals, pachhyu intones over the 'kaidu' then takes off the decoration
Cutting up the 'kaidu'
pachhyu packing away his paraphernalia; people eating little bits of 'kaidu' as prasad

Phailu 8th May 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641145>

Notes

A leisurely walk up - here about 1.30pm. We heard the pachhyu drumming and found that the 'Phailu' in Dilmaya's house had already started.

Film

Pachhyu drumming, chants and sways. Dilmaya lights incense sticks, circles them round the 'kaidu' and pushes them into it. Assistant pachhyu by window
'Kaidu', then just visible, Surje's silhouette
Surje beside 'kaidu', pachhyu resting. Bombahadur plucking chicken, pachhyu watches
Pachhyu muttering a prayer beside 'kaidu', Bombahadur wearing pachhyu's hat
Dilmaya cooking on fire.
Drumming and cymbals.
Surje, with Bombahadur, and pachhyu drumming.
Dilmaya pours out a cup of liquid.

Pachhyus kneeling and swaying, drumming and chanting by 'kaidu'.
Pachhyus drumming faster.
Surje, Bombahadur and a child. Pachhyus drumming and chanting very fast and wild.
Pachhyus, kneeling, drumming by 'kaidu'.
Surje crawls in front of camera, takes some 'dhup' out of bag and puts it onto charcoal in a dish.
Women shaking slivers of bamboo with loops at ends towards the pachhyus.
Sound gets increasingly wild again, then calms.
Women put down their bamboo slivers.
Majina puts part of a loom onto the rack above the fire.
Bombahadur lighting incense sticks which he circles on top of the 'kaidu'.
Bombahadur with palms together moving hands over the 'kaidu'.
Bombahadur dancing on mat by 'kaidu', Surje shaking next to him.
[part omitted for privacy and the dangers of the rhythm]
Drumming slows, Surje suddenly stops shaking, touches forehead, makes namaste, takes his hat off and wipes his face with it
Drumming and chanting starts again.
Extended family sitting on the floor together.
Bombahadur and assistant pachhyu swinging the 'kaidu' on a winnowing tray towards the chanting pachhyu.
Premkumari, hands in offering gesture.
Pachhyu takes top off 'kaidu', and garland.
Rice broken into lumps and handed out as 'prasad' by Parsing.
Towchiri eating rice with her left hand.

Plahgu lava 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647285>

Notes

Had tea on the way down in Budibahadur's house. Learnt that they had lost a buffalo. Budibahadur had borrowed 5000rs. to buy the buffalo, to have milk for his children. When it was killed, his wife said they found a snake and a toad in its stomach. The pachhyu is coming from Taprang tomorrow to do a rite - the 'plobu waba' - to try and reverse Budibahadur's bad luck.

Film

Taprang Pachhyu doing the 'Plghu lava' rite for House32
Pachhyu with assistant Badrasing, washing a sacrifice cock by the spring
Fire, then altar, Pachhyu and Badrasing breaking up the corpse for offering
Pachhyu ringing bell and chanting over the altar
Pachhyu takes string from altar which he gives to Badrasing to tie round handle of 'ashi'

then gives Badrasing a little dish (of oil?) to put beside the fire -
Pachhyu ringing bell and chanting the while. Indicates that
Badrasing should scratch the wall stones with the point of the
'ashi'

Pachhyu, chanting and bell ringing, follows Badrasing carrying
'ashi' and dish of meat back to House32

Pachhyu chanting and ringing bell inside Budibahadur's house

Grah Tihba Ritual - 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647146>

Ritual performed by Yarjung Kromche Tamu for a client and family

Pachhyu ritual – 1999



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647170>

Pachhyu (Umardhoj) from Taprang does a ritual involving a goat. A small part of the ritual with the pachhyu reciting a mantra or charm.

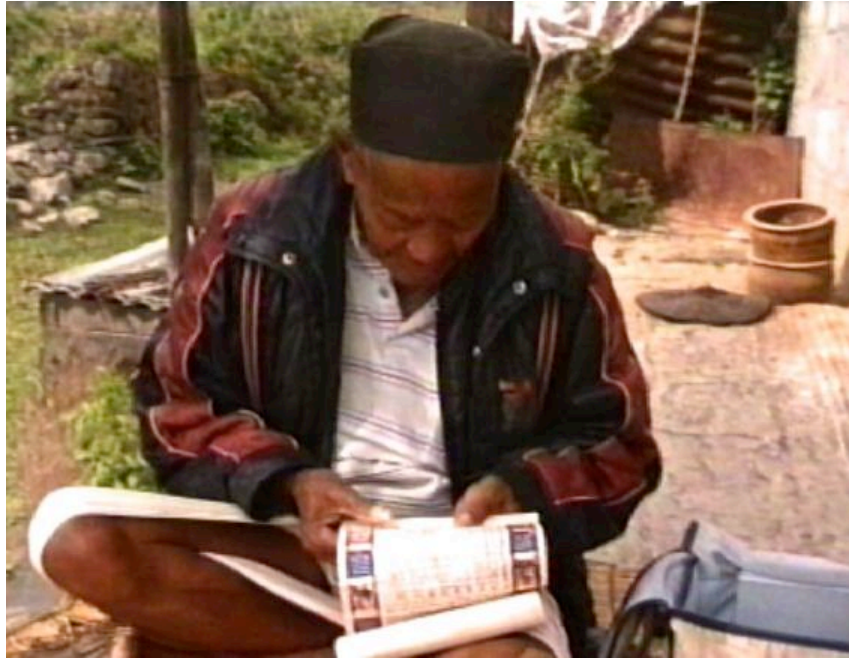
Casting a horoscope 1990



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647242>

A pachhyu casting a horoscope for auspicious name for orphaned baby, Tanting village 23.2.1990

Reading a parga Parsing pachhyu 1990



While we were talking, a customer came to see the old pachhyu. He wanted to know if this was an auspicious time for him to marry off his son. The old man went outside and began to check the astrological signs and the 'lho' and 'parga' of the intended couple. Alan filmed him at work. The customer paid in a plate of rice and four rupees. We didn't hear the final outcome, but the pachhyu was adamant that this year was not auspicious.

**Parsing Pachyu's ritual objects described by his son,
Yarjung, in 1990**



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2562915>

The Jhankri (Tailor ritual expert)

Jhankri doing ritual to cure toothache – 1992



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647162>

A Tailor jhankri or ritual expert striking a lady suffering from toothache with a brush and saying spells over her.

Ritual for deafness – 2000



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647154>

Danaram Tailor does a ritual, based on the 'Plogu laba' ritual of the departed pachhyu priest, to help cure Alan Macfarlane's deafness; Thak 11.1.2000

Film

Leaf dishes of rice and grains

Danaram chanting while burning 'dhup'

Danaram muttering mantra while burning 'dhup'

Danaram chanting in possession ('tarava')

Small chicken brought by Gunga to sacrifice, fed by Danaram

Muttering mantra, then hissing and circling own head with ash which he then puts on Alan's forehead and then Surje's.

Women washing the chicken

Danaram holding the chicken by the legs and circling it over the offerings while muttering

Sprinkling water over the chicken before Surje takes it off to cut its throat.

Danaram muttering before following Surje and the chicken
Putting out offerings on the steps below the house.
Muttering a mantra, Danaram slits the chicken's throat and
sprinkles the blood. Then pulls out some feathers which he puts
with the offerings.
Makes what looks like specific signs with the tip of the 'ashee' and
sprinkles water over the site of the sacrifice.
Stands and circles several times while hissing and muttering.
Returns to the house following Surje.
Danaram preparing to brush Alan
Muttering mantra and hissing before striking Alan with the brush.

The Gurung Memorial Ritual or Pae

Introduction

A visitor in Gurung country in the cold weather may meet numbers of people in their best dresses going to other villages for a memorial ritual called the “pae lava”. This rite incorporates and symbolizes much of ancient Gurung culture and is the central Gurung institution.

At a person’s death, the body is carried either to a village cemetery where it can be buried or burnt, or down to the river where it is burnt. At this point it is believed that the spirit of the dead person is released and wanders around the village. For the spirit to leave the village, it must be conducted along the ‘soul path’ to the land of the dead, over the mountains, and therefore it is necessary within a few years of death to hold a “pae lava”. The date is set by the priest, hundreds of relatives and friends from neighbouring villages are invited, and a white flag is set up over the dead person’s house.

The rituals are conducted by “pachhyu” and “klebre”, often several of each. Lamas now do this ritual too, but this is a recent innovation and is generally done without animal sacrifice. The amount of money spent on the “pae” depends on the wealth of the deceased and his family. The ancient rite requires the sacrifice of buffaloes, sheep, goats and chicken. This, and the provision of rice and drink for the guests, means that a “pae” for a rich man or woman can cost anything up to 20,000 rs. (in 1995) - about the cost of a new house - though half this cost will be returned in gifts brought by the guests.

An auspicious day is first chosen by the pachuy or klehbri. When the day arrives, the ritual opens with the making of an effigy or effigies representing the dead person or persons. The effigy consists of a bamboo frame over which white cloth is stretched. Clothes of the deceased, a jacket, blouse or shawl, or sometimes newly bought clothes, are wrapped round the frame, and garlands of flowers, cigarettes and money are added to make it as attractive as possible. Meanwhile the priests have begun to chant and beat drums and cymbals, and later they will do a slow

dance around the effigy. The chanting and dancing continues throughout three days and two nights. The chants are myths which explain to the dead person how he should proceed past various dangers to the land of the dead. The close relatives, particularly the women, weep openly. At intervals animals are killed and everyone sits down and eats rice and meat off leaf platters. Vast cauldrons are used to cook the rice and the meat.

Two of the most dramatic incidents occur on the second day. In one, male relatives of the dead person take a stick and pierces it through a bamboo circle symbolizing the breaking through of the barriers to the land of the dead. A procession of priests, mourners and guests is then formed, following a long white sheet held up on poles representing the road to the land of the dead. They are led to a nearby field where a ritual battle takes place. A relative, if possible the dead person's younger sister's husband, holds a small branch in his hands in which he keeps a piece of bone from the dead person. A battle-dance takes place between him and a "klebre". They circle round each other, advancing and retreating, the "klebre" beating cymbals, dressed in a long-skirted costume with a Tibetan-style headdress, trying to take the bone from the relative. Ultimately the "klebre" must triumph and the dead spirit is symbolically released from family ties.

Towards the end of the "pae" trays of rice cakes, cigarettes, biscuits, fruit and other food and drink are laid on the ground, sheep representing the dead person are forcibly encouraged to eat. It is believed the sheep will eat the favourite food of the dead person first and that when they are subsequently sacrificed there will be no trace of any food in their stomachs. The sacrificed animals all accompany the soul to the land of the dead. This ritual provides an effective catharsis for the mourners who are gently taken through their grief as the departure of their loved one is enacted. The support and sympathy of guests, the colour and spectacle, and the rhythmic chanting and drumming, makes it a particularly powerful way to cope with grief. It is interesting to see that many of the Gurungs who have moved to Pokhara are still holding the "pae lava" for this very reason.

Description of the ritual by the Thak pachhyu Ujesing Gurung

(Described to Alan Macfarlane in October 1969)

FIRST DAY

'Ta' relatives come - given a little 'pa' and 'kae'. 'Ta' goes off to cut 'rih' (bamboo) - first sprinkles with rice and 'pa' before cutting. Then start - put 'pyoh' upside down in courtyard and another on the washing platform. Other people (in gola) bring wood, water, leaves etc.

The 'moh' (workers or real) kills 'thinju' goat (= 'te'tsuba' - to tell foreigners and the dead person the 'pae lava' has started) - 'nega', or flesh of goat is given to Klehbri, pachhyu, 'a-syon', 'lathuba', 'ghyan khava', 'tah' (relative), those who make food daughters, sisters who are preparing goodies for the 'a-la'. Then bring 'shyaku' for pachhyu (and 'gundri') - the Pachhyu sits on washing platform on above.

'Moh' have brought bamboos for the A-la, if a woman spinning "bobbin" (off which thread comes) put in top of 'chhyu-ta' (a piece of foliage) - for men an arrow is put.

An 'a-syon' must arrive before any other strangers. The 'a-syon' make a little house, nearby - mustn't eat rice or sleep in house - they hang a little 'pa' on front of their "shack" - then foreigners may come down.

Then Pachhyu asks for two thirds pathi of 'mlhassi', a little 'pa' and 'prahma', some tiny bits of meat from all over the 'thinju' goat, asks for names of all persons who have died in family and have not had 'pae lava' done - i.e. infants and children - writes these down - copy to Klehbri, then recites: - 'shirra charra', 'tso pli pie', 'chu cheba' [1 hour]. Asks to bring 'rih' (bamboo), then brings strip of cloth (8 elbows lengths) - white, then brings 'chu-ta', prepares everything. Then from house bring foodstuffs (everything: 'pa', rice, oranges, biscuits etc.); daughters, sisters.

Start of the ritual

Then everything ready - then when 'ta' makes first hole in bamboo (to insert the cloth) he is 'shyalava'd' - by village elders and white thread put round his neck. Pachhyu's 'tondo' (double-ended drum) is brought and a little meat ('thinju') - burnt - is rubbed on drum and another bit given to the 'ta' to put in/or sprinkle on (both possible) the bamboo. Then little bits of all the foodstuffs are sprinkled on the bamboo - the 'ta' does this (with no hats on -

Then all together the Pachhyu hits drum/people whistle/bang in hole-making instrument into the bamboo. Then 8 holes are made ('preymi' - 'pre' - seems to be pun on 'pie?'). Then 'laddeen shideen' (dina kley/songya) person brings two firesticks from house and brings the wood he has earlier prepared - then lights the fire. One firestick is taken to 'a-syon's' hut, the other is put in Pachhyu's "rest-place" (shelter) and some to Klehbri, and one Bhancca/shidikaeidi' = Gg. house (i.e. where food is prepared), another to place where women are congregated.

Then the arrow or spindle/bobbin are put in top of bamboo (= head of person). No food yet put in. Then daughter, then sisters, bring 'chyugu' and then smooth onto the small bit of greenery ('chutah') - 'Krasa lava' and cry while doing. Then all the foodstuffs are put on the top of the pole - first those from house, then daughters, 'rih chahmi' and 'dajubhai', 'istometra', 'a-syonmae'. Then put up on roof by young men. Then put pa bottle/milk tied on at top = 'a-la' (Nep. = 'jandi') - telling dead person to come down and also representation of him. All this while Pachhyu has been drumming. When Pachhyu first beat drum one of workers ('moh') put 8 mana of 'mlhassi' to cook and fire - for the Klehbri to make 'kaindu'. He makes 'kaindu' 8-9 and 'kegan tonba pie':- then 'Kegyan' goat is killed. The goat is cut into bits 'negan', and a little is cooked there. Everyone eats a tiny bit of 'kaindu' and meat.

Phailu ritual

Then Pachhyu goes into house and recites, 'Shingu tiba pie'. Needs one 'chenna' (flour sieving tray), calls for head of household - 4 leaves, each with 1 mutthi of 'mlhassi' put on sieve, 1 piece of money onto 3 of the heaps, on another 'duna' (= leaf?) 1 mana of 'mlhassi', 3 other 'duna' on which the things prepared on 'laddeen shideen' day (see above) are placed - put on by both Pachhyu and Klehbri. Bits of meat from the 'thinju' (goat), plus 'ti' (heart) are put on sieve. 1 'dalo' with 3 pathi of 'mlhassi' - 1 bottle of 'pa' (or half bottle) and a little 'khyuni' or 'kae', and a little 'pa' and 'prahma', a little bit of 'chu-ta' (in 'dalo') - as used on 'a-la'; leaves from 'laddeen shideen'. 'Laddeen Shideen' person is called 'dina kleh' - then he crosses his arms and picks up the 'kae'/'mlhassi' which he has prepared on 'Laddeen Shideen'. day - with each crossed hand and drops it into the 3 pathi 'dalo' of 'mlhassi'. Then crosses hands over the other way (before right under left) and takes back rice (makes path good for spirit). Then repeats once more - i.e. does 3 times. Then what is left of 'Laddeen Shideen' rice is taken off and put into the rice cooking hut.

Then Pachhyu puts the 'chu-ta' on fire and then holding 'chu-ta' in right hand. Pachhyu again recites: - 'Tsongdah, Todah, Prudah, Poidah, Meedah, Tsongdah, Yuldah' (a slight variation on this - then speaks to dead person - telling him he must worship another god), "we will give you all these foods here - you are dead - you must come down the 'a-la'" ('Lalle' Pachhyu calls it) - then the 'plah' comes down to Marysandi - to the crossroads there, then the Pachhyu goes off to 'plah naasa', then down again to "river of forgetfulness" and then at point ('Kwogan' - see other 'pie'), then up into skies 'Tible naasa' - only Pachhyu is travelling, then to 'nabri' and then to 'Kwogan' again and then up again across 'mlikyu' and then crossroads up Munkola and round by Ghan Pokhara and around Lamjung and then Argon and down to south of Pokhara and then round to west to Nowakote and then up to north to Modi, Baglung etc. -> Ghandrung, Lumle -> Kaski -> Lowar -> Modi, Gachuck, Mrisa, Tsolu, Harpan, Ngwolu, Atigar, Iagan, Moja, Bisgu, down south -> Pokhara -> then off to East round Pokhara, Argon, Lamja, Noleldada, Chhachock, Yanjakot -> then up to nearly Siklis, then down river to this village - then up path to Siklis, then up path towards 'plah naasa' and then round to west

to head waters of Setii - then back from 'Tinsiri' across forest to Khilang and then down to this village, then down 'a-la' - explains again what is being given to him.

Then Pachhyu asks for names of ancestors ('juju baje') of house, also calls the 'a-syon', 'i' ('dajubhai'). Pachhyu recites to a person who knows all the distant ancestors (of both sexes) - 'Kyala toba pie' (calling the ancestors who had 'pae'). 'Ta' then says above names.

Then 'a-syon' do the same. Then 'pie' tells ancestors to eat and then to dwell with the new spirit. (Ngobje eg.). The 'mlhassi' and little piles and pieces of money are given to person(s) who knew the names. Then Pachhyu drums and at first strike 'phola bhionba' - little balls of rice thrown in 4 directions by son and one ball of rice given to each house (as in burial rite). Eat and drink.

SECOND DAY

Early in morning a 'moh' goes to get wood for 'plah'. 'Kugur chuba' = a baby 'plah' is put inside the main plah = exactly the same = if a child/infant's 'pae' is also being done. A rough piece of cloth put on bottom of 'plah' for it to rest on. 'Moh-mae' make this. Klehbri sits on washing platform and recites 'Kle songie pae lava pie' ('Kyala Konu raja's pae lava Predi Kyalbo's pae lava, Pallawui Kyala's pae lava' (see these 'pie' of Pachhyu), 'shirra charra, chu cheba, radah pie, nga shol lava') - during this the 'moh-mae' have made 'plah' and put a good 'gundri' etc. Then daughter/sisters again 'Krasa lava' - i.e. smear the 'chu-ta' with 'chyugu'. Then dress in very good clothes - the 'plah'. Then the Klehbri puts on special clothes and plays and dances. Then the 'rih' or little tube of bamboo with nails etc. in has been brought, it is then put in another bamboo holder and little cloth tied round it (for man = white, women, female clothes) and a little bit of chu-ta put in the top.

Fetching the spirit: rih teba

'Rih tebari (going to find)/Kibari (dancing) iaba' - a 'moh' holding the bamboo container for the 'rih' and the Klehbri and take the food etc. along - then they dance opposite each other

and 'moh' is lured slowly nearer till he gives up 'rih' on the carpet - it is to bring 'plah'/'rih' spirit and then it is put in the top of the 'plah'. Then the Klehbri dances round 'plah' 3 times.

Chhyadu Sheba dance of the men

Then the Pachhyu plays drum and 'chhyadu sheba' (dance) for half an hour to many hours. 'Chhyadu kwi' sings a series of songs stressing how good the world is and may it continue to be so (happy etc.) Klehbri at same time are, on washing place, 'Kyal toba' (= same as pachhyu rite of naming ancestors). 'Shon kwe' (= 'A-shon kwe') neva' (= put on) - Klehbri does this - to bless the 'a-syon-Koi' which is put on top of the 'plah' 'morava kwe'.

Plah wiva: calling the plah

Pachhyu, 'Plah niva' - call 'plah', sometimes outside, usually inside. If outside the 'moh-di' is made (bamboo frame) to hang chicken on. Millet - 3 pathi, 1 mana of 'mlhassi', 1 bottle of 'pa', 'Laddeen Shideen' brings one of his leaves to put in 'pa' bottle as cork, a little 'chu-ta'; then Pachhyu recites (holding smoking 'chu-ta' in right hand) - 'Shirra-charra, Tsongda - Tsongdah, Lih Kwonva pie, Plah niva pie' (goes up to Sirbi moh's place (Sirbikamon) at top of Sheti river and brings back 'plah': - then explains to 'plah' that a 'pae lava' is going on and brings it down to this village and then puts it in 'chhogon' and then comes down (in 'pie') to house ('chophul') - all people are called into house as doors will be shut.

Then 'a-syon' and relatives etc. come in with little gifts of goodies; then get a little food from cooking hut and some "pure" water. Door shut and wash chicken - then tie chicken to door. Another 'moh' holding 'ashi' says 'cheku' (= calling dead person). Then bring 'plah' down to door in 'pie' and explain all good things, waiting for him ('plah niva pie'). When shakes, 'plah' comes down: if more than one 'pae lava' is being done - then several chicken.

Pachhyu recites 'Tse pih lava pie' (throwing away Sirbikamon 'moh' which has accompanied 'plah' down) - names same places as in Yuldah - at the beginning shortened journey - then takes

'moh' off and buries in usual 'moh' burial place. Then children/grown up beat Pachhyu's drum ('tonde'). [Giver: House, daughter, 'daju bhai, 'istomitra', 'a-syon'].

THIRD DAY

[Day again] Klehbri does 'tonva' ('tonva pie') = to keep the 'yo' or good fortune in the house when spirit goes off. Tonkyu sheep is killed at this point. Pachhyu then does 'Sherga seba' - dances and recites. ['plah pie, tondhu (drums) pie, choleh (cymbals) pie, tongi (drum) pie, Kusun iame pie, Sherga chaba pie, taie (flowers etc.) pie, Sherga teba [4 hrs], a-syon lemmkomae pie, takwi (again flowers), tsepi lava pie, pargre kie, kiowtaje pie, shimi sava (to escort 'plah'), Sherga chalava pie']. At this point the sheep are given food - they will accompany soul (1 = soul, the other his friend).

Rhi Jonva

'Rhi jonva' - 'Nari' two thirds of 'nari' and 1 mana of 'mlhassi' and 1 muthi of 'mlha' onto 3 leaves and 3 single coins. Make a lot of 'kaindu' - millet. A little 'pa'/'prahma' and chicken meat. Get the 'dajubhai', 'ta', 'a-syonmae', people who named ancestors. In middle of rice winnowing basket put a 'pela' full of millet in the middle, an 8' piece of 'moh' bamboo and then spreads out millet flour, then puts the 'kaindu' on the flour - one 'kaindu' for each 'daju-bhai', 'a-syon', 'ta' = one each. One large one = the "King" of them. Puts a little fish meat on King's head and 'prahma'- then recites over the bamboo having made "King" 'kaindu'. Then brushes King 'kaindu' over with the bamboo - if falls well then spirit has gone off well (happily). 'Rhi Kieva/jonva pie' (explains that the 'plah' out of the house (see above). Then each 'daju-bhai' 'kaindu' is done in turn - same meaning and action as above [= misfortune/illness will strike person in future - because my own 'pitra' or spirits (i.e. father/grandfather) are unhappy = not the dead person - because e.g. I haven't done the proper rites to them). Last of all does 'a-syon'.

Letting go or destroying the effigy or plah

Pae liba. Klehbri recites a little in house: ? - Then 'plah' taken out of house (reluctantly) - playing and dancing. The 'ta' (Ngobje) brings down the 'a-la' (- then kill 2 sheep: 'tuhkyu' is killed while 'plah' is being brought out, 'Kwokyu' killed when 'plah' outside) and Klehbri dances. Then Pachhyu circles heads (with chickens and beads) of 'jahan'/'a-syon', daughters and neighbours, and those who ask to 'shyalava' them and put threads on. Then again 'Tahgra lava' [spearing through a circle of bamboo - see above] - 'ta', 'daju bhai', 'a-syon'. Then take off the 'plah' by 'moh' - in opposite direction to 'rhi tehba' - the daughters and relatives cry. Cut up the 'a-la'. The Pachhyu goes, but Klehbri alone recites. ['Rupa kweva pie' said]. Then 'a-syon' puts on a new hat. Destroy the 'plah' and bring back the cloth. The 'moh' eat/drink the food on the 'a-la'. 'A-syon kwe' is given to Klehbri, 'plah mohrava kwe' given to 'moh'. 'a-la kwe' (house bought) given to 'tsami' (real daughters).

FINAL DAY

Final day: blessing of the guests etc.

Pregi lava Ke (to bless everyone). (At special time - previous reckoned). 'Tsongdah' = a little piece of meat and tail of 'Keju' goat is brought out. Put the 'tsongdah' on a pole in the courtyard. A 'jongo' and 'kaior' (pan) and 'pangyo'/'dodu' - all cooking instruments, are brought from cooking hut. Then everyone is asked if they have finished food - then Pachhyu and all rest/sit down on mat in courtyard. 'A-syon' are called. Millet, two thirds of pathi, 1 mana of 'mlhassi', 'pa'/'prahma', 'thinju' goat's head, then Pachhyu recites: - 'chu cheba, ta Kyarava pie' (as in 'Rupa Kweva' rite) (Klehbri at this point in house 'dala pliba shimi tuba' - all the clothes on the 'plah'/'a-la' etc. in front of Klehbri who blesses it). As in other 'pie' the pachhyu "he, he" gestures with arm - for two hours recites this 'pie'.

'A-syonmae' bring flowers and rice for foreheads and 'a-syon'/'ngimae'/'paruwa' all sit down with Pachhyu. 'A-syonmae' to 'ngimaelai' (= 'moh' in relation to 'a-syon' = those doing funeral) put rice on foreheads (men) and to men tie 'kregi

tiba' - tie bits of white cloth. 'Kramu kuba' to women - ie. tie on 'kramu' onto head ['a-syonmae' have brought these at Pokhara and give them: mother's brother's: 'A-syon' all the close relatives of wife's - elder brothers/sisters/parents etc:). 'A-syon' bring 'pa' and milk and 'kae' and 'shyalava' done by 'a-syonmae' and put flowers in hair. Bring 'toli' and put 'pela' in it with a little 'pa' in: then each ('moh') ('ngimae') drinks the 'pa', poured in by 'a-syon' - he pours in only enough for one person and refills before the rest. Same with milk and 'kae' - 'prasad lava' ('sudhu lava'): - to bring good fortune/luck = Pachhyu reciting 'Ashika malla' during this time.

Then all the other relatives do the same - giving a little money or 'kramu' to the family who are doing 'pae lava' and 'shyalava'. [If I have given a lot to other people's 'pae', then a lot will be given to me = 'kih nor']. Then count up the amount of money/'kramu' given - all the "chiefs" of village. Then 'pae lava' people go inside house. 'A-syon' stay behind with Pachhyu. Then "chiefs" of village ask 'a-syon' how much they had to spend on funeral - add all up. Then one 'cheeva' goes in and tells funeral family how much they spent. Then the funeral people bring back out of house exactly the same amount of 'pa'/'milk'/'kramu', money etc. and process is exactly reversed. Ask if o.k. Then the money is again counted. [If 'a-syon' have given 100rs. - 200rs. is given back, x2 - if the funeral family = very rich then x3 amount is given back - at House55 double is given back - about 60-70rs. - the 'kramu' etc. are not doubled, but given back equally]. This is sometimes done next day. [Iche (= proud) people give a lot].

'Laddeen Shideen' person is 'shyalava' and 'kregi tiba' (cloth tied round), given food and 'pa' by burial family. Then the same is done to chief cook, to sisters/daughters 'Krasa lava rih' - daughters, same done (don't 'gar a'madido' = be angry?, because we are going (sic) to). [- depends on 'Iche' how much is given to Pachhyu. - only given 1rs. (but usually about 5-10rs.) Fees: - given according to age of Pachhyu - 30rs. to all the Pachhyu there.]. Then Pachhyu/Klehbri done the same - given money and food etc. All relatives who come down bring a little food and drink - a bottle of 'pa' and 2 manas of rice e.g. Then they are given back money etc. - 2rs. for bottle of 'pa', 6rs. for mana of 'chyugu' - (e.g. ordinary fees). If possible more will be given back

than received i.e. 15rs. for 10rs., worth of goods etc. But may apologize. Klehbri does 'tasu waba' - (take away all evil, etc.). Everyone goes. [Only a fraction of what actually happens says Pachhyu].

Bernard Pignède, *The Gurungs* pp. 369 ff. gives a detailed description of the ritual, based on fieldwork in 1958 in the village of Mohoriya, north-west of Pokhara.

The 1995 ritual for Dilmaya

There is a detailed description, with full film of the event, of the pae for Dilmaya Gurung from November 29 to December 29 1995 in the separate volume on her life. The film of the three days of that event can be found at:

FIRST DAY: November 29th 1995

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641217>

SECOND DAY: November 30th 1995

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641225>

THE THIRD DAY 1st December 1995

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641235>

FOURTH DAY: 2nd December

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1641243>

Three dances from this ritual (Rih teba, Chhyadu and Sherga) are noted above under 'Six Sacred Dances'

Early films of ritual – 1969-70



<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1647178>

During Alan Macfarlane's first fieldwork in Thak during 1969 he only had a small 8 mm movie camera during the last three months of his stay. The film is silent and the clips short, but it is worth including this early footage.

Film

Plogu laba ritual with a goat, Thak pachhyu
Thak pachhyu protecting the rice pile with ritual involving ash and vegetables
Bayo puja (to protect animals) in Mohoriya village
Buje Deurali ritual in Thak
Rhi Teba ritual dance and feasting at a memorial (pae lava) in Siklis, filmed by Prembahadur Gurung

Appendix: Photos of Kusun Dance in Thak 19 April 1992

As explained in the book above, it is dangerous to make the film (sound) of the Kusun available to a general audience. But it is such an important ritual that I have given a full account, and here are a set of photographs taken of a relatively peaceful Kusun (described above) taken by Hilda and Gerry Martin.









The changing world of the Gurungs



1969



2010

Much of this book describing the world of the Gurungs has treated the subject in a timeless fashion. Most of the filming was done between 1988 and 2001 and much of the description is of this period. In fact, of course, the village has changed considerably over the fifty years since I first visited it in 1968. A full analysis of these changes, given the richness of the data we have collected, would be a very lengthy study indeed. It may be done in the future. In the meantime, here are a few snapshots of what I thought was changing at various points in time.

Twenty years after first arriving

The first was written some twenty years after I first went to the village. With I.B. Gurung I wrote a short *Guide to the Gurungs* in 1987 while on a trek in the Lamjung area. Here are two sections adapted from that account.¹ The first outlines the huge changes which had occurred up to the time of my first visit. The second reflects briefly on the more recent changes and the possible future.

Change and adaptation

The villages give an unchanging appearance, as if they had existed in their present form for centuries. In fact, there has been very rapid change in the mountains. Accounts of the Gurungs written in the nineteenth century describe an economy that depended mainly on pasturing sheep, on long-distance trade over the Himalayas in which they acted as middle-men in the exchange of salt from Tibet for rice from lowland Nepal, and in growing certain high-altitude crops such as buckwheat. They were also keen hunters, did some mining and went abroad to serve as soldiers in foreign armies. At that time, they lived in small settlements in the high forest, at between 7000 and 12000 feet, burning clearings for their crops and taking their great flocks of sheep onto the high pastures in the summer when the snow had melted.

During the following hundred and fifty years the Gurung population grew steadily from about 30,000 to its present total in

¹ A version of this account was published as 'Some Background Notes on Gurung Identity in a Period of Rapid Change' in *Kailash*, vol. xv, nos 3-4 (1989)

1988 of roughly 200,000, and new villages were built on lower slopes where rice could be grown in flooded fields. They were now further from the pastures and the flocks dwindled. From the early nineteenth-century the British began to recruit them into the Gurkha regiments. During the First World War, approximately 7,000 Gurungs were recruited from West Nepal into regular battalions. Even in peace time many thousands of Gurungs were serving abroad, and after 1947 they were recruited into both Indian and British regiments. Army pay and pensions now formed an income as important as that from agriculture. Retired soldiers built large stone and slate houses in the hills and their relative affluence pushed up the price of land.

At one stage in their history, the Gurungs seem to have been ruled by petty princes. For instance, there was a prince who ruled part of the Lamjung region from a fortress at over ten thousand feet, the ruins of which still lie in the forest. After the unification of Nepal in the middle of the eighteenth century, these rulers lost much of their power. Instead, Gurung villages were more or less self-ruling communities, policing themselves under the guidance of hereditary chiefly families and meetings of the elders. They paid few taxes to the government, and in return the government did almost nothing for them and interfered little. This tradition of very light government was retained with the introduction of a system based on the Indian panchayats in the 1950's.

Now the ruling families have been replaced by an elected council for a specific area or 'Panchayat'. Higher level regional and national councils also have elected members, through the provincial and up to the national 'Panchayat'. Conflicts are referred up these levels, depending on their seriousness, but a very large proportion of everyday business is settled at the village meeting. These meetings demonstrate another feature of government, namely that most decisions are taken after a great deal of talking. Only when a consensus has been reached will something be done. Dissenters are gently persuaded to conform and respect is shown for different points of view. Hence bad feelings and long-term resentments are avoided and harmony usually prevails.

Although the rapid inflow of foreign aid has made the State far more important for villagers than it used to be, it is still true that government is light. There are no permanent representatives of central government, the police or other officials, in most Gurung

villages, and taxes are minimal. Bureaucracy is growing as new forms for registering births, deaths and marriages, land purchases are introduced, and Gurungs resent the condescending and unhelpful manner of some of the desk-bound bureaucrats in the towns. In general, Gurung villages are a model of how a people left to themselves can order their own affairs peacefully without much government interference.

At the peak period of army recruitment, in many Gurung villages the majority of men undertook military service. This exposed them to outside influences and gave them access to cash which would otherwise not have been available. For instance, it was estimated that in the village of Thak in 1970, about one third of the total village income came from foreign army service. These remittances, from serving soldiers and the pensions of those who had retired from the army, raised them above the level of subsistence farmers and helped to make them one of the most prosperous groups in Nepal.

There has recently been a change in the nature and volume of this inflow of cash to the villages. Whereas previously the foreign army pay and pensions were used to buy land and build houses in the village, both of which acted as a way of redistributing wealth and pushing up the value of agricultural land, this is now decreasing. Retired soldiers, especially those with the larger pay and pensions from the British Army, are finding it more profitable to invest in land and houses in the towns where they can also educate their children and enjoy the relative luxuries and ease afforded by 'civilization'. If we add to this the continued scaling down of British recruitment to the Gurkhas, 1948 - 37,000, 1965 - 15,000 and 1980 - 7,000 men, it is clear that the Gurungs in the villages can no longer rely on the steady inflow of money as in the past. To a large extent this is being replaced by work in the Indian Army, which now employs at least 40,000 Gurkhas and even more importantly by civilian work in India and Arabia.

The future

In the last twenty year the pace of change has gathered momentum. There is evidence of growing poverty in the hills, both absolute and relative, and a growing dependence on the outside world. The diet has deteriorated, the paths are not as well kept, fields are being left to revert to scrub, gold ornaments have

been sold off, clothes are less adequate. It is difficult to quantify this, but one indication is that total grain production in Thak has dropped by a half in the years between 1969 and 1987, while the population has remained constant. This is mainly caused by less intensive and satisfactory use of the land. Land has gone out of cultivation, some has been eroded and swept away by landslides, but most importantly far fewer animals are kept and as a result there is too little manure to keep the fields in good heart. From being more or less self-sufficient in grains, this, and many other villages, are now buying grain from the nearby markets.

The total population in the Gurung villages has increased, but not so much as one might have expected because of very considerable out-migration. In Thak, the balance has shifted so that blacksmiths and tailors constitute a very important part of the work-force, working the lands of the absent Gurungs. Share-cropping has increased hugely in the last twenty years. This share-cropping for absentee or elderly owners reflects the very large increase in out-migration. This is one of the most dramatic changes in Gurung villages, from temporary absences soldiering in foreign armies, to permanent out-migration to the towns. Ironically, the towns, such as Pokhara, are becoming more mongoloid as the hill peoples settle in them, while the hills are becoming more Indo-Aryan as Brahmins, Chetris and the service castes raise their large families and take in the marginal lands. Only at the time of the memorial service for the dead does one tend to see a Gurung village looking as it used to look, with the richly dressed town dwellers coming to visit their country cousins. The 'village' has to be conceived of now as essentially dispersed. All this is less true of the remoter villages, but even there the pull of the towns is felt.

The major mechanism of this dislocation is education, which attracts the wealthier to the towns and quickly turns their children into citizens who would find it unsatisfying and physically exhausting to return to the villages. Scarcely any of those from Thak who went off to Pokhara to school in the 1970's have returned to the village, nor have they tended to become soldiers. Mostly they have gone to factories and offices in India or Arabia where they can make some use of their skills.

As to the cause of the decline in the villages which has turned a number of them from rice-surplus to rice-deficit economies, there are various theories. One is that ecological degradation is central.

The monsoon rains leaching and scouring the over-worked, steep mountain sides has inevitably reduced the productivity of the soil. There is clearly something in this, but even more important would seem to be an economic explanation. The opening up of the flat land in the Terai, along the southern border of Nepal, combined with improved roads up to the market towns, such as Pokhara which lie on the south of the Gurung area, has had a very strong effect. It is now more efficient, cheap and easy to grow crops in the Terai than it is in the hills.

A 'rational' village boy can see that his labour is far more productive working for wages in the town, in India or Arabia, or even more so in a foreign army, than on a farm the hills. With money, he can buy food and other necessities. He can earn from three to fifty times as much a day as he would in the village, and the work will be less exhausting. Indeed, if these young men did not go off, the villages would be more impoverished because the farms would have to be sub-divided between all the sons and there would be no cash income from outside the village. Without this, it would be impossible for villagers to begin to pay for the necessary goods from the towns. In Thak, in 1987, the average annual expenditure per family on food and other goods from Pokhara was five thousand rupees, much of the cash coming from sons working abroad.

Thus the villagers are reacting with economic good sense to the market forces from outside which are coming to bear on them, the Gurungs are as ever learning how to adapt and change, as they did in their previous transformations from shepherds to settled cultivators, and from farmers to soldiers. Now, using the villages as a base, they 'hunt and gather' all over the world, but their new territory is not the high pastures and thick forests of the nineteenth century, but the streets of Hong Kong, Bombay or Pokhara. Their survival, of course, is not merely an economic matter, but also, more deeply, a cultural one, maintaining a feeling of identity, a shared set of customs and language, which marks them out in an increasingly competitive and crowded world.

Just as they have adapted to the world market and to world religions, they have adapted to becoming part of a wider language group. Whereas most villagers spoke Gurung most of the time twenty years ago, now every child learns Nepali and the songs and everyday speech reflect a strong move towards the new language.

Gurung children brought up in the towns can often not speak Gurung anymore.

Flexibility and adaptability are important devices, but it may be wondered how far one can bend before one is no longer what one was before. What does it mean to be a 'Gurung', if one no longer practices Gurung agriculture, uses the language, or employs the Gurung priests? This is a current concern among the Gurungs themselves and there is much discussion, in particular about the core Gurung institution, the "pae lava", the memorial service for the dead. If this is totally modified, many feel that nothing will be left and the 'Gurungs' will have ceased to have an independent existence; their dances, their songs, their young people's dormitories, their language, their priests and their funeral ritual will have withered and they will merge into an amorphous mass of part hill-folk, part townsmen.

There is certainly such a danger, but the signs are of an increasing interest in the past and in what it means to be a Gurung, of how best to maintain an ethnic identity while adapting and becoming a citizen and a member of larger political, religious and linguistic groupings. Much of this description concerns life in relatively small villages of a few hundred people. These are the communities in which the majority of Gurungs still live, but there are a growing number of Gurungs, perhaps a third or so of the total, who do not live in villages in Nepal. Though they maintain many Gurung customs, they do not live by agriculture and they lead lives which are fundamentally different from their relatives in the hills.

There are firstly the ten thousand or so Gurung soldiers in the Indian, British and other armies, who are posted in many parts of the world. Subject to a strict and hierarchical discipline, they are separated for long periods from their wives and children. Though they often enjoy the comradeship and certainty of army life in a closed institution, and appreciate the possibility of eating and dressing well, of saving money and contributing to a good pension, they are also often lonely and bored in foreign camps. Whether in Dehra Dun, on the Assam frontier, in the Falklands or in Berkshire, they perform with great efficiency and a good spirit, but in a world of timed routines and mechanical western values which is very far from the fluid rhythms of their village upbringing.

A second even larger group are the Gurungs who are working abroad as civilians, particularly in India. There have always been such people, but as population pressure mounts in the hills and opportunities for foreign army recruitment declines, the numbers have increased rapidly. The majority are in Bombay, with others in Calcutta, Delhi and Arabia. Young men in their early twenties will go and live in tiny flats with their friends. For instance, there are about forty boys from the village of Thak in Bombay, working in factories, and as drivers and watchmen. Many of them later take their wives and children, so any chance of saving or sending money back to the village will be minimal. The contrast between the dirt, noise and crowding of such a city existence and the life in the hills is very sharp.

The third group are those who have retired, mainly from foreign army service, but have not gone back to the village. This is again a recent phenomenon. If we take the village of Thak, in 1970 only two or three families had retired to towns in India or Nepal. By 1987, in Pokhara alone there were forty-six households from Thak, most having retired on pensions. These ex-army men had amassed considerable wealth by Nepalese standards, and in their middle thirties are starting a second life. But though they have experience of living abroad as well as capital, many find it difficult to know what to do other than to buy land and build a smart house.

Of thirty Thak men who had retired from foreign armies, permanently living in Pokhara, one third were doing nothing in particular, other than living off pensions and invested capital. The rest were engaged in various jobs; farming, army welfare work, and as drivers. What was noticeable by its omission was any involvement in local government and bureaucracy, or in local trade and industry such as shopkeepers, entrepreneurs or small businessmen. Some Gurungs feel that the bureaucracy is an alien world controlled by Brahmins and Chetris in which they have little chance. Nor do they tend to use their savings to set up businesses, except for a few concerns such as the Ex-Servicemen's Bus Company. On the whole they lack the experience and the institutional framework to employ their energies and capital productively in the towns, yet they are reluctant to distribute or invest it in the villages.

Much of their wealth goes on education. It is the aim of every father to educate his children, and particularly sons, up to tenth

grade and if possible beyond. Otherwise, the life for many, and particularly women is one of a new-found leisure, where water, firewood and food are now bought with cash and instantly available, very expensive but no longer requiring much physical effort. Women's tasks, in particular, are very much lighter. Yet it would seem that for many who are used to the insistent rhythms which give meaning to life in the village and army, the semi-retired existence in Pokhara can be boring and empty. People complain of the anonymous, individualistic existence where the warmth and community feeling has gone, where the dangers of drugs, crime and sex threaten the young, and where the Gurungs feel second-class citizens, the prey to unscrupulous people after their savings. Yet prices are going up so fast, and the future hopes of their children so pressing, that they feel they cannot afford not to live there. Their children also find it more stimulating than village life.

It is interesting to find that not all of them are totally committed to town life. A number of Gurungs who have settled in Pokhara have kept land in their village. Some of them talk about going back there to live once their children have finished their education and can support themselves. If roads are constructed into the hills, some think that the villages near to Pokhara may become viable again. In that case they would be happy to return to their village farms.

The skill of the Gurungs lies in blending these lives. Through their constant movements, reunions and partings and through the strength of the family, they hold together the worlds of Hong Kong, Bombay, Pokhara and the village. They adapt well and never entirely surrender to the pressures of any single environment, carrying their good humour, tolerance, practical skills and religious beliefs with them wherever they go.

Thirty years after first arriving

I was asked in 1997 by a journalist in Kathmandu to write an article for a magazine about change in the village.

Himalayan Diary; where have all the witches gone?²

One of the most puzzling problems in the history of western civilization is the reason for the decline in magical and witchcraft beliefs. Briefly the puzzle is that such beliefs seem to have declined before any viable alternative had been developed. It is not clear why people should have rejected the philosophical comfort and practical protection of magical activities when 'science' offered no theoretical or practical alternatives.³ Not much headway has been made in solving this problem since Keith Thomas wrote. In this situation, it seems worth approaching the problem from a different angle by looking at a contemporary example of a rapid shift from magical explanations and action to something else.

What is needed is an example which has been observed more or less continuously over a generation and in which there has been a rapid change in magical beliefs. Such a small case study can be made in the Gurung village of Thak (Gurung=Tolson) to the north of Pokhara in central Nepal. The village and its economy have been described in a previous publication and the general features of Gurung society have also been quite fully described.⁴

When I first visited the village of Thak as part of fifteen months of fieldwork between 1968 and 1970, a flourishing magical economy

² I would especially like to thank Sarah Harrison, Gerry Martin, the University of Cambridge and the Economic and Social Research Council for their support in the work upon which this article is based.

³ For a classic statement of the problem, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, London, 1970, especially ch.22.

⁴ See Alan Macfarlane, *Resources and Population: a Study of the Gurungs of Central Nepal* (Cambridge, 1976); Bernard Pignede, *The Gurungs* (Ratna Pustak Bhandar, Kathmandu, 1993), trans. and edited by Sarah Harrison and Alan Macfarlane; Donald A. Messerschmidt, *The Gurungs of Nepal: Conflict and Change in a Village Society* (London, 1974). For a brief introduction see Alan Macfarlane and Indrabahadur Gurung, *A Guide to the Gurungs* (Ratna Pustak Bhandar, 1992).

was still in evidence. Alongside occasional visits by Lamas and Brahmins, as well as numerous small rituals for local godlings, and the activities of lower caste *jankris*, the magical world was served by a well-known shamanic priest known as a *pucu* or *poju*.⁵ In his myths and rituals he carried on an ancient tradition of pre-Tibetan shamanic practice, brought down over thousands of years probably from western China.

The *poju* engaged in numerous rituals which were directed at warding off evil by divining the cause of misfortune and driving it away. The ubiquity, importance and variety of these rites can be seen if we briefly look at Ujesing Poju's estimate of the frequency of his rituals in any one year. Many of the lengthiest and most complex, such as the *moshi tiba*, *ngonge sheba*, *mee le sheba* had been performed two to ten times in the year, many smaller ones, such as the *chowb cheba* and *plogu waba*, he had performed from twenty to fifty times each, others, such as the *patlu waba*, had performed in every house in the village. At a rough estimate, taking all forty or so of his major rituals, the *poju* must have performed well over three hundred rituals in one year in the central hundred households of my study in one year.

In the process of performing these rites over the years, and in active co-operation with the suspicions of villagers, a large number of 'witches' had been identified. I carried out a 'census' of people thought to be witches in 1969 with one experienced informant. In the sample hundred households, there were 23 suspected witches. Seven were not Gurung (Blacksmiths, Tailors and Magars), all were female except two, and they were most aged between forty and seventy.⁶ Thus on almost every occasion of misfortune and illness, witchcraft suspicions were reinforced. Every few days, except in the busiest planting season, small rituals against witches and other evil spirits were undertaken.

⁵For a longer account see 'A Guide to the Gurungs', 36-43 and Alan Macfarlane, 'Death, Disease and Curing in a Himalayan Village' in *Asian Highland Societies in Anthropological Perspective* (Delhi, 1981)

⁶ These statistics are abbreviated from Pignede, *The Gurungs*, trans. Harrison and Macfarlane, p.476; appendix F. in that work gives a longer account of witchcraft beliefs among the Gurungs.

Thirty years later the situation has changed. Apart from the occasional ritual to protect a house (*di bar lava*), the *poju*'s activities, like other traditional practices such as the boys' and girls' dormitories (*rodee*) and the traditional dance (the *ghato sheba*) have more or less disappeared. The change was already evident when I re-visited Thak in 1986, but it has been particularly rapid in the last three years or so. The *poju* family moved down to Pokhara over the 1980s and the last of them had gone by 1991. Since then their visits have been ever less frequent and when needed a *poju* for the neighbouring village of Taprang has to be summoned.

The present situation is shown by some impressionistic statistics of present magical activity. The lama is still called down once a year by eleven families to do the *lhu teba* (for general good future), people still employ the Tailor *jhankri* for divining on occasion and Brahmins occasionally do *pujas* for the richer families, but the vast bulk of activities overseen by the *poju* have disappeared. We asked a number of families how many times in the last three years they had employed a *poju* in rites other than the *di bar lava* and scarcely any had done so. Most had given up use of the *poju* and several quite aggressively so, suggesting he was a waste of time, money, and a deceiver. As for witches, most noted that they seemed mysteriously to have disappeared. Several informants, half-jokingly, drew the conclusion that 'when the *pojus* went, so did the witches'. But all were agreed that witches, having been widespread, now seemed to have vanished. Of course, for a very long time it had been illegal to accuse someone of witchcraft, but this had not stopped suspicions, gossip and rituals. Now, it seems, witches are irrelevant; more practical worries, hail, the possibility of profitable emigration, loans and debts, fill people's minds. The whole world seems to have gone through an almost perfectly paradigmatic transition from magic.

Yet why has there been this change? Here we may consider a number of the conventional theories concerning the reasons for the fading away of magic put forward by other analysts. One of the most famous is that to be derived from Bronislaw Malinowski, namely that magic expands and shrinks depending on the degree of control people can exercise over their material and social surroundings.⁷ Malinowski noted that magical activities were particularly concentrated on highly important, yet ultimately risky,

⁷ See, for example, B.Malinowski 'Magic, science and religion' in *Science, Religion and reality*, ed. J.Needham (London, 1925).

activities such as open-sea navigation. Others have frequently noted that magic is especially to be found where activities are unpredictable, for example when making butter or beer or other craft activities where, however well one performs, things still sometimes go wrong.

This theory would explain the decline in magical belief and activities in Thak in terms of a growing mastery of the natural world by the Gurungs. In one respect, and an important one, there has been a dramatic change, and that is in health. In 1968-1970, although the situation was not as bad as many societies, the villagers suffered from numerous minor and occasional major diseases.⁸ During the last thirty years there has been quite a dramatic improvement in health.

This is not, however, the result of health care provision in the institutional sense. There is now a Health Post in a neighbouring village, but villagers hardly ever use it, alleging that the relatively large staff and frequent supplies of medicine are of practically no use - there is seldom any medicine to be had, the staff are absent, and often they are given prescriptions and told to go and buy the medicine in Pokhara.

There are several hospitals in Pokhara, but again, though the villagers do try to use these and do use the medical stores, this makes only a marginal difference to their health. Endless stories circulate in villages of the inefficiency, corruption, lack of interest and incompetence of those working in the city hospitals. Whether these are basically true or not, it is clear that villagers feel that large sums of money are squandered to little effect. Very often villagers receive the same treatment as they might obtain in the health post, often without any proper examination, often pumped with inappropriate drugs, often told to go and buy medicine in the drug stores. It is possible that the hospitals save on average one or two villager's lives a year, at the most. But they can only provide marginal help in child care or delivery, and cannot deal with the thousands of minor ailments from which villagers suffer.

So what has transformed the health situation? There seem to be three major factors. Firstly, public health campaigns, the mass inoculation and injection of children against such diseases as smallpox, measles, mumps, have already reduced recurrent epidemics. Secondly, some improvements in the supply of piped

⁸For details, see Macfarlane, 'Death, Disease and Curing'

water have reduced the incidence of enteric diseases, especially those affecting infants. There may be other differences, such as the greater consumption of tea.⁹ But for whatever reason, and it cannot be to do with other aspects of the diet which has conspicuously deteriorated in the last thirty years, or other environmental reasons, houses are no better, paths as dirty, dogs and fleas widespread, the fact remains that people seem generally to be less seriously ill and in particular infant mortality rates have dropped considerably.

The third change is the most important. People are not only less ill, but many perceive illness in a new way. This is the heart of the puzzle. Although the health-care services provided to them are very insufficient, villagers still believe that, ultimately, 'science' as it is sometimes termed, can provide a solution. Although the actual provision of pain relief is out of their reach or unsatisfactory, they do not blame the system of 'science', but blame its administration. In other words they 'believe' in western medicine, without either understanding how it works or being able to show that it works for them. Thus western medicine could be seen as the replacement of one set of 'magical' beliefs by another.

The changing situation can be encapsulated in two experiences. In 1969 when a person was ill I gave them an aspirin and they were also treated by the shaman. When asked what had cured them, they were in no doubt that it was the shaman. In 1998, the same double treatment was offered, but this time they were adamant that it was the western medicine which was most effective.

Yet the consequences are considerable. The whole of the previous system depended on the belief that most human suffering originated from the intentions of intelligent beings - godlings, *bhuts* and *prets*, witches. Western medicine locates the illness in invisible entities - bacteria, viruses, amoeba. Although the action of germs is largely not understood, what people do understand is that diseases are not caused by other human-like entities, evil thoughts and intentions. For whatever reasons, therefore, people now trust more in the efficacy of western medicines than the cures of the *poju*.

All this is very strange if we remember the famous distinction of E.E. Evans-Pritchard, for while traditional curing explained to people both *how* an illness occurred (through the activities of evil

⁹For the revolutionary importance of tea as a medicine, see Alan Macfarlane, *The Savage Wars of Peace, England, Japan and the Malthusian Trap* (Oxford 1997), ch. 8.

spirits and witches) and *why* it occurred (because of previous events, the hatred of a witch or whatever) western medicine deals with the *how* but not the *why*.¹⁰ Why I should suffer and not another, why it should happen now and not tomorrow, all these questions are left unresolved by western bio-medicine. If, as some allege, the greatest invention of the twentieth century is the suspended judgment, the ability to say that one does not know the reason for things, although one hopes to do so at some time in the future, then the Gurungs have recently acquired this great invention.

At a wider level, the theory of the controllability of the material environment hardly works for the Gurungs. Despite the doses of foreign aid and Gurkha remittances, the villagers live in a less secure economic and social environment than they did thirty years ago. Their fields produce about half the crops, there are less than half as many animals, they have sold their gold, most are heavily in debt, attempts to earn income by waged work in countries such as Malaysia, Saudi Arabia and elsewhere have generally brought little, if any, reward. The wealthy have moved to Pokhara, and those who remain work incredibly hard to keep themselves above the level of starvation. In 1997, for example, half of the rice and maize harvest was wiped out by hail in Thak and surrounding villages. These villagers, once proud recruits into the Gurkha forces, are becoming amongst the poorest people in Asia as they try to overcome the obvious fact that the enormously steep hillsides make village agriculture uncompetitive.

Scarcely anything else has been done to give them any sense of control over their lives. There are no metalled roads. The water supply is intermittent. The school is poorly equipped. Any feeling of control over their own destinies has been further reduced by a shift in the political structure. Ironically, the onset of 'democracy' has reduced democracy. Previously there were regular village meetings to discuss and decide village matters, where both men and women participated. Now, the Village Development Committees are bureaucratic organizations, consisting of a few village 'representatives' but in fact not answerable to the village. The major encouraging response to this has been the formation of 'women's dance groups', who raise money through dancing and use this for paths, school improvement and so on.

¹⁰E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande* (Oxford, 1937).

So, on the whole, apart from the inoculation campaign and decline in infant mortality and certain other diseases, there has been a considerable decline in the standard of living. People work harder as animals become more scarce, and their diet has worsened. Women in their thirties and forties are to be seen day after day carrying their own weight of straw, wood and fodder up or down several thousand feet, bare foot and sweating, on a diet of maize porridge (*pengo*), with no meat, few vegetables, and often not even able to afford *dahl* (lentils). It is not control of the world within the village, at least, that has reduced the belief in magic, though it could be argued that what they hear on the radio, watch on the one television set in the village, hear about through the village school, or see on their visits to Pokhara, may be important, showing that an alternative exists.

Another theory to explain the decline of beliefs in witchcraft and magic is that it reflects a change in social relations. There are two major varieties of this idea. One is that witchcraft reflects tensions in a society, it is a 'social strain gauge' in Max Marwick's famous phrase.¹¹ This would suggest that tensions have declined in the village. There may be something in this. Up to about 1970, all returning Gurkhas came back to the village and the jealousies and pressures between new wealth and the older families was quite considerable. Now such people retire to Pokhara and build large and beautiful houses alongside relative strangers. So the pressures may have been reduced.

The second theory suggests that where all good things come through personal channels, the gifts of friends and family and so on, it is only natural to assume that evil things will also flow along human channels - in this case along mystical channels originating in the hatred of enemies. The implication of this argument, originally suggested by Max Gluckman is that as a system becomes more complex, with the development of market mechanisms, money, bureaucracy and the State, so people will increasingly conceive a world where both good and evil flow from the endeavours of individuals, or impersonal forces.¹² Hence they will stop believing in personalized misfortune.

¹¹ See M.G.Marwick, *Sorcery in its Social Setting* (Manchester, 1965).

¹² Max Gluckman, *Politics, Law and Ritual in Tribal Society* (Oxford, 1965), ch.6.

Again there may be some force in this argument. The tentacles of both market relations and the State, though far from dominant, have increasingly spread into the village. Gurung economy was fully monetized long ago, but now, as the village depends for most of its luxuries and necessities upon the outside market, importing all types of goods including rice and maize, it is clearly an extension of the world capitalist system. The collapse of some East Asian economies, or the fluctuations of the Nepalese rupee, affects these villagers almost as much as they do a factory worker in Kathmandu. Likewise, with the building of the first government office in the village a couple of years ago and the appointment of two permanent government officials, a Secretary and Assistant Secretary, to the village, we can see the formal incorporation of the previously largely independent village into the Nepali state. In such a situation, where people can compare their experience with other villages and Nepali citizens as a whole, where they know how much of their lives is now dependent on the machinations of bureaucrats, traders, teachers, NGO's and so on, the significance of personal ties has probably declined.

These are all 'demand-side' factors, that is to say the need people feel for magical explanations. Equally important, and not entirely separate, are 'supply-side' factors. One of the main reasons why the *poju* left Thak, and other shamans are leaving many other villages, is economic. The increasing poverty of the villagers means that not only can they no longer easily afford to pay the annual traditional payment of millet (one *pothi* per household) but find it almost impossible either to pay the *poju* a reasonable amount for a particular rite, or to afford the main sacrificial animals needed for the rituals.

In 1968, a day's earnings for work in the fields, including food, was about ten rupees, and a large cockerel or small goat for sacrifice would cost about eight rupees. Thus one could buy the sacrifice with a day's work. In 1998, a day's work earns thirty rupees plus two snacks, while a reasonable cockerel or small goat will cost at least three hundred rupees or more. Thus a sacrificial animal now costs the equivalent of ten days of hard labour. It is not surprising, therefore, that we have been told a number of times that what finally decided a person not to summon the *poju* was the knowledge that if the shaman recommended a sacrifice, the family could not afford it. Having talked to other *pojus*, who explain how they can no longer live on their traditional payments, educational and other

costs for outstripping the small payments in kind they receive, the fact that a growing market for certain *poju* activities has opened up in Pokhara and further afield was an added inducement for the shamans to leave. So the *poju* family left one by one. Once they had gone, even if people needed a *poju*, often in an emergency, there was no-one available. Thus demand and supply conspired to move people towards non-magical solutions or at least passive hope that something better would shortly be available.

This Himalayan village is in some ways in the same position as those who increasingly abandoned magical and witchcraft explanations in Europe from the middle of the seventeenth century. Until the very end of the nineteenth century, there was little understanding of the real causes of diseases, for it was impossible until the time of Koch and Pasteur to isolate bacteria. Even by 1895, scarcely anything was known about the real causes of most serious diseases.¹³ Thus for two centuries people had faith that a solution would be found, even if it had not yet appeared. They believed in science as a method, before science had produced many tangible results. Likewise people in Thak believe in western technologies and knowledge, and still even have a certain wistful hope that *bikas* (development) will occur and 'democracy' will really emerge, against much of the present evidence of their eyes.

Their world is thus becoming increasingly disenchanted in the Weberian sense - with less interpenetration of the mystical and material - and yet it is becoming enchanted in another, this time the enchantment being the promise of western affluence and liberty. It will be interesting to see whether their faith will one day be rewarded and whether, if they ever reverse the rapid decline of the last generations, they decide to re-enchant their world, as is increasingly happening in the west, where 'New Age' faiths, including shamans, are all the fashion, just as, ironically, they disappear in Thak and other Gurung villages.

All of this goes to show how dangerous predictions are in the social sciences. After my first visit to Thak in 1968-1970 I wrote that 'If the economic situation deteriorates, and particularly foreign aid instigated health facilities decline, then the Gurungs will probably retreat to their own stand-by systems of ritual healing and herbal cures which have served them for so many centuries.'¹⁴ The

¹³Macfarlane, *The Savage Wars of Peace*, 374

¹⁴Macfarlane, 'Death, Disease and Curing', p.128

economic situation in the village has deteriorated greatly and health facilities, while not declining, are scarcely better now than they were in the late 1960s when my statistics show that in the period 1965-9 some forty women and sixty-eight men from Thak *panchayat* visited the mission hospital.¹⁵ Yet the Gurungs have not retreated back into their former enchanted universe, they have become marginal members of the universe of 'rational' western institutions. But just as some would argue that they get 'education' without much enlightenment, 'democracy' without a noticeable increase in personal power, and 'bikas' without real development, so they get the promises of a new solution to the problem of pain without many of the tangible means to good health.

'Sliding Down Hill: Some reflections on thirty years of change in a Himalayan village'¹⁶

I first came to Nepal in December 1968 with my wife Gill and stayed for fifteen months. We spent a year working in the Gurung village of Thak, about five hours walk north of Pokhara. I returned with my second wife, Sarah Harrison, in 1986 and we have visited Nepal and Thak for periods of between three weeks and three months in almost every year since. The first fieldwork led to a Ph.D. in anthropology which was subsequently published as *Resources and Population: A Study of the Gurungs of Central Nepal* (Cambridge, 1976). The planned re-publication of this book by Ratna Pustak Bhandar of Kathmandu makes it appropriate to reflect on some of the changes which have occurred in one village in the more than thirty years since I first visited it. This brief account, based on arguably the most intensive longitudinal study of a single Himalayan community ever made, can only sketch in a

¹⁵Macfarlane, 'Death, Disease and Curing', p.101

¹⁶ This article was originally written in 1999 and first appeared in *The European Bulletin for Himalayan Research*, July 2002. It also appeared as the preface, with slight amendments, to the new edition of *Resources and Population: A Study of Gurungs of Nepal*, published by Ratna Pustak (Kathmandu, 2003).

few of the changes. We hope to publish a more detailed ethnography, possibly based not only on the extensive genealogical and survey accounts but also the many films and photographs which we have taken, at a later point.

In one sense, at least on the surface, there has been little change in the village since my first fieldwork. The basic agricultural and craft techniques described in *Resources and Population* are still used. The amount of labour input for various tasks is roughly the same and the village lands shown in the maps to the book have not changed greatly. The main village and the nearby hamlets are not greatly changed in their physical form, though a number of houses have tin roofs and there is now a diesel mill and two television sets (powered by car batteries) in the village. The track up the valley is somewhat improved and it is possible to get a car to the bottom of the steep climb up to the village, saving a three-hour walk. The water pipe is larger and a number of houses have taken small pipes off it. Yet there is still no electricity, no telephone, no motorable road, and no health post. The children no longer have to climb down to a school forty minutes below the village, as there is a village school with five classes in it. There is a government office and a large water tank with watchman's house (unoccupied). The two 'shops' have a much wider range of goods, including beer and coke, than in 1968 when they basically only had tea.

The major prediction of *Resources* was that with a population growth rate of over one per cent per year, and a doubling time of thirty years or so, there would be ecological disaster in this and other villages like it. The already over-stretched forest and land resources would collapse and the Malthusian checks of famine and disease, if not war, would probably return.

One part of this prediction has been fulfilled. The population of the hundred sample households in the original survey has indeed at least doubled in that period and so there are now over two hundred households stemming from the original hundred. Yet when one visits Thak itself, the village is, if anything, slightly smaller in the number of occupied houses than it was in 1969. The paradox is explained by something, which it was not possible to predict in 1969, that there would be very extensive and permanent out-migration.

The pattern described in *Resources* was of temporary labour migration, with many men leaving for army service in the British

and Indian armies. These soldiers returned with their pay and pensions and the profits from army service was invested in the village. From the middle of the 1970's, as army recruitment dried up and towns such as Kathmandu and Pokhara grew, the pattern changed. Waves of young men started to go to wherever work was available. They went first to India and later to East and south-east Asia, the Middle East and a few to Europe and America. When they and the remaining army service men retired they no longer came back to the village but settled in the town, in particular in nearby Pokhara.

So there is now not only the core village in the hills, but a 'dispersed' village of equal size, particularly concentrated on the road that leads from Thak into Pokhara. Currently young people from the village are in Hong Kong, Malaysia, India, the Arab States, Europe and elsewhere. If they are lucky enough to make any money, they will invest their savings in buying land and building houses in towns and cities, not in the village.

The beneficial effect of this out-migration has been to prevent ecological collapse. If anything, the forest above Thak is in better condition than it was in 1969. The tree cover is growing back closer to the village. This is the result of a slight decline in the need for firewood and also because of another large change, which I shall describe, the dramatic decrease in number of larger animals. So, although there has been erosion and loss of some land through landslides, the catastrophe, which I predicted in relation to the forest, has not occurred.

The negative effect on the wealth and development prospects of the village is, however, equally great. These steep and rocky hills cannot sustain people at a reasonable level of affluence from settled agriculture. In the earlier study, I showed that over a third of the total income in the village came from army pay and pensions and civilian work abroad, and this constituted almost all the cash that was available to villagers. This has declined to a thin trickle from the few labourers abroad who save a little and send it home. Furthermore, those with most initiative and experience of new ways, who used to return, no longer do so. Only the young children, the old and the poor are left in the village. Consequently, there is little leadership and little experience of the wider world, and few political contacts available to the village.

The results can be seen in the material culture. The clothes are often ragged, the numbers of brass pots and cauldrons is much

reduced, the gold ornaments of the women that were so apparent in 1969 have almost all been sold off. One receives the strong impression that people are actually poorer now than they were then, despite the massive growth of wealth in parts of Asia, Europe and America.

Thus, the village is not facing imminent famine or disease, but it may well be facing malnutrition. One of the major changes in the thirty years has been in diet. Although new foodstuffs are more easily available for those with cash, for example iodine salt, oil and sugar, the basic foodstuff, rice, is becoming too expensive for many villagers. Currently only two of the hundred households in my original sample area are self-sufficient in rice, a considerable drop from the situation thirty years ago. Most have to eat millet and maize for much of the year. In 1969, most of the medium families had enough meat and milk to consume one or both at least twice a week. Now even the wealthier families only eat meat once or twice a month and milk is a luxury for everyone.

Since the mid 1990's we have noticed for the first time that a number of the villagers, and particularly the women, were abnormally thin, their bodies appeared to be wasting away, with no reserves of fat. The amazing way in which villagers metabolize food so that the huge expenditure of energy are possible on the basis of a very small calorific input has long puzzled biological anthropologists. But the limits seem to have been reached and the people may be starting to starve.

The shortage of meat and milk is one aspect of the most dramatic change in the village, the decline in domestic animals. The number of livestock in the sample area of Thak has more than halved in the period between 1969 and 1999. The traction power available for the fields through the use of oxen has declined the milk, oil, meat and manure provided by stalled and herded buffaloes and cows has declined. The Gurungs were still pastoralists to a certain extent in 1969, as they had been for thousands of years. By 2000 those remaining in the villages are settled arable farmers with a meagre carbohydrate diet.

The growing poverty is also the result of a third major change, the decline in land productivity. Land, which produced, say, 100 kg. of rice or maize in a good year will now produce on average only a little over half that amount. The decline in the amount of manure, far from compensated for by fertilizer (which most people cannot afford), is but one reason for this. Thirty years of

constant use and the leaching effect of monsoon rains have lowered productivity hugely. Meanwhile cheap grains from the Terai and India have skewed the costs of grain in the village.

The total result of both local and national changes can be seen in the rapidly falling value of land in the village over the thirty years. While land prices have rocketed in Pokhara, they have hardly risen in the village. Again, the decrease in income is shown in the decline in returns on labour. The wages for ploughing in the fields in 1969 was 10 rupees for a day's work. The cost of a chicken was 8 rupees. Now the wages are about 50 rupees and the cost of a chicken is 400 rupees or more. In 1969 forty days of work would earn enough to buy a buffalo. Now one would have to work for more than two hundred days to do the same.

Only one villager has enough rice to sell some, so all of the clothing, education, medicine and extra food have to be paid for from the trickle of gifts and foreign earnings. There is a serious shortfall. One result of this is massive indebtedness. I was unable to make a systematic study of indebtedness during my first fieldwork, but subsequently we have been able to make extensive enquiries. The results are staggering.

Almost every family is heavily indebted, often for very large sums of more than a thousand pounds sterling equivalent (over a lak in Nepalese money). Much of the borrowing is for special occasions, weddings, funerals, and illness but the main reason is to 'agents' to facilitate work abroad. To go to South Korea or Hong Kong or Japan (in all of which most work illegally, so without the simplest of safeguards) families often borrow up to ten thousand pounds sterling (10 laks), on which they pay interest of up to seventy percent per year. For the Gulf States the sums are roughly seventy to eighty thousand rupees. Frequently the money is lost through theft or police corruption in the country where, often illegally, the migrants are working. In conclusion, then, while the ecological situation is stable, the economic position of the village has declined greatly and real poverty is emerging.

The social and cultural situation has also changed. When I first visited Thak it was a rich cultural community. There were young people's associations (the 'rodi'), much co-operative labour, singing and dancing in the evening, communal picnics and so on. Almost all of this has gone. So too has most of the ancient shamanic tradition of the local 'poju' priest, who can now only be seen at work on special occasions in the village, such as the

memorial service or 'pae'. In what is relatively a twinkling of an eye, after several thousand years of maintaining a cultural tradition, the old ways have largely been wiped out. Ironically, it is more resolutely maintained in the towns, where numerous Gurung associations are flourishing which emphasize the older ways, particularly in the impressive Gurung Centre (Tamu Pye Lhu Sang) in Pokhara which is building a museum and ritual centre.

Thus the village has very few of the 'benefits' of civilization – some plastic, inoculation campaigns, a diesel mill – but carries many of the costs, alienation, individualization, dependency and corruption. These are features of town life as well. Yet these undermining effects are mitigated by a number of features of Gurung society, one of which is worth stressing. This is the way in which the Gurungs, mainly in the towns, but also villages, are energetically building up a non-political 'civil society'. This gives them some control over their lives and will increasingly strengthen them in relation to factional politics and the power of the State. The Gurungs have for long been noted for their co-operative labour organizations and other ways of working together. Currently in Pokhara the Gurungs of Thak, for example, have set up a 'Thak support committee', there are also lineage-based social groups which meet and have picnics or celebrate other occasions and provide mutual support, there are local groups of women (as in the village) who raise money for goods works, and there are at least two main, over-arching, Gurung societies.

All this activity, which crosscuts lineage and locality, although building on that as well, gives purpose and strength to their lives. They support each other in their migrations as they have always done, and the demoralizing atomization caused by moving into the towns is mitigated.

There are thus grounds for both optimism and pessimism. At the end of *Resources* I was extremely pessimistic, predicting mass hardship and little 'development' of any kind. Now the situation is more complex. There are many successful Gurungs in the towns and a number of the young are well educated and idealistic. It is in the villages such as Thak that amidst the tremendous beauty and social warmth one finds increasingly impoverished people. Many of the inhabitants are now elderly or children and the proportion of poorer Blacksmiths and Tailors has increased; all of them are struggling to make a living from almost impossible

mountain slopes. Their backbreaking labour is day by day leading them into greater debt and food shortage. Whether electricity, which is now about five years away in the most optimistic estimate, motorable roads, telephones and bi-industries will alter this trend it is impossible to say. I would like to be optimistic, but the situation in the village leads me to be as pessimistic as I was in 1969, but for different reasons.

Reflections on thirty-five years of change in Thak

(April 2004)

I am honoured to be invited to write a short piece for the Magazine of the Janakalyan Youth Club of Thak and wish all the readers a happy Baisakh Purnima.

My first wife Gill and I came to Thak in December 1968. We stayed for a year and saw a world which was fascinating and intriguing. The cultural traditions of the village were very strong. The *ghato* dance was still danced in the village and we attended several dances, and had it performed in front of our house. The young people still had the *rodi* of a kind, where people met in the evenings to sing and chat. In fact our own house became a sort of *rodi* where we dispensed horlicks and sang 'pick a bale of cotton' and other songs accompanied by myself on the guitar.

The *poju* priest, Ujesing, was very active and he and his family attended many rituals. Almost nightly, it seems, there was a ritual, from short ones to protect a house or divine illness, to very long ones like the *moshi tiba*, which lasted a day and a night. The memorial service for the dead, the *pae lava*, was often performed with great ceremony and bodies were also carried down to the river for cremation.

People worked quite communally, in *nogora* and *ghola* groupings. There was much singing and even dancing in the fields and especially after the harvest.

The diet was reasonable, with a good deal of meat and milk, since there were herds of buffalo and other animals in the forests and many people had stalled animals in their courtyards. There were a number of families who produced enough rice or maize to sell it either in the village or down in Pokhara.

There was quite a lot of money coming into the village from pensions and most of those who retired from the army built houses in the village and retired there, bringing back goods and cash. So the village had a number of widely travelled and experienced men in it.

There were difficulties as well. The path up from Pokhara was very rough and the last climb to the village was a very steep muddy track up a sheer cliff. There were no taxis up the river valley, so one had to walk the whole way to Pokhara. Pokhara itself had almost nothing in it – half a dozen small hotels, half a dozen taxis, no real hospitals, no shops selling anything beyond grain and vegetables. There was no road to Kathmandu. The only way to get there was by plane or by walking.

In the village itself, there was a ‘night school’, but no school. There was no shop and no panchayat office. There was no health post at Taprang. Children had to go down to the school at Melbort every day, however young they were. There were, as I recall, no radios, and certainly no television. The water supply was very bad, as there was no tank above the village. Most people had to wait for an hour or two every day to get water. There were no toilets and the paths through the village were very rough.

To sum it up, it was a rich cultural world, the food supply was adequate, the village felt a sense of self-confidence. No-one went off to live in Pokhara. But the physical conditions were quite simple and difficult.

Changes

I returned with my second wife Sarah in 1986, and between then and 2001 we visited the village for between one and three months almost every year. I followed up my earlier work, adding video filming and more detailed photography to the earlier work.

We watched the village changing very rapidly.

My earlier predictions that the village might suffer from severe food shortages due to the growth of population was not borne out. In fact, the population did double, but half of it migrated to Pokhara, Kathmandu and elsewhere. Thak became a dispersed or ‘virtual’ village, with its members all over the world. Many soldiers began to retire to Pokhara and the external income from pensions and other sources declined.

So did the produce of the fields as the land’s fertility was used up. The number of animals also declined so that while the diet became more diverse (with sugar, vegetables, oil and other things from Pokhara), it also became more based on grains rather than meat and milk.

The amenities in the village improved in certain ways. A junior school was built on the hill above the village with a volley-ball pitch. A water tank ensured that the water supply was more constant. The paths up to the village were considerably improved and the roads out of Pokhara began to improve and carry taxis. The health post at Taprang was built and the school there was improved. Pokhara itself became a sophisticated small city with many goods and services. Democracy was installed.

On the other hand, with the migration out of many of the leading families, with the search for work abroad by many of the young people, and for other reasons, the social and cultural life was affected. The *ghato* and *kusun* disappeared. The evenings saw less singing and dancing. Ujesing and his family left and the poju rituals became less frequent and the fears of witchcraft declined. Television and the radio replaced older forms of communal entertainment.

The future

My predictions on the basis of my time in 1968-1970 turned out to largely wrong. Famine and deforestation have not occurred. So I am wary about predictions, especially as I have not been back to the village (because of the political problems) since 2001. Nepal is on a knife-edge as everyone knows, and what happens in Thak will depend on wider currents about which it is difficult to be certain.

It could be that the pattern which happened over much of Europe in the 1960's will be followed. For one generation in France, Italy, Portugal, Spain and elsewhere most of the young and active and wealthy left the villages and went to work and live in the towns and abroad. Then, after a generation, as the countries became wealthier and roads and electricity went up into the hills, the hill villages became alive again, partly as holiday homes, partly with people commuting out of them down to the cities. If electricity and roads come to Thak, this might happen.

Or it might be that the difficulty of hill agriculture and the attractions of the easier life in the cities may continue to suck the life out of the villages and they will turn into areas mainly inhabited by the old, poor and non Gurungs.

Only you, the readers of this magazine, will both be able to see what is happening and will be able to shape the outcome. I wish

you all success in upholding a village and a community which is my second home and in which I have lived for three years.

Whatever happens, we have documented this fascinating period of change. That is probably the best-studied community anywhere in the Himalayas. Gradually we hope to make our materials available in the Gurung museum in Pokhara so that you and your children and children's children can remember a world which is so rapidly changing.

In a few years you will be able to watch the films and see the photographs and, we hope, have a record of a wonderful people whose courage and energy and cheerfulness have been an inspiration to my wife and I. We also urgently hope that it will not be too long until we can see you all again, even though we are both getting quite elderly.

Forty Years of Change in a Gurung Village

(Synopsis of talk in the Vajra Bookshop, Kathmandu, 2010)

The film of the talk can be seen at:
<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/1776735>

First arrival in December 1968 - what Kathmandu and Pokhara were like, shops etc.
Five cars, no road etc.
Going up to Thak - where it is etc.
Went to Nepal by mistake - Naga Hills - Christoph redirects me and advises me - Pignede and Gurungs. Siklis. Stopped in Thak.
My training in history - difficulties of fieldwork. Very remote.
Long walks, no structure to the day etc. Lonely and homesick and very confused. No Gurung grammar. Fifteen months there.
Mainly population and resources at SOAS.
Thought I'd go back soon - but didn't, children etc.
Very few anthropologists go back beyond once or twice. Why?
Haimendorf from place to place.
Re-married and went back in 1986. They will have forgotten me - but Bhuwansing etc.
As if we'd never been away. Stayed for a week, Sarah insists we return. Bhuwansing - adoption. Meeting with Bhuwansing.
Replaced oldest son.
Went back in 1987 - very happy. 1988 and onwards etc.
Spent six years of my life in Nepal. I am a historian but something keeps pulling me back.
How I have changed - changed inside. Change in approach to what anthropology is: anthropology as a science from imperial power, not to get too close. They were subjects inside a test tube.
End of British colonialism.
Always kept your distance: post-Malinowski, off verandah, but diaries. I had close friendships but also a lot of reserve - participation had to be limited because of observation.
This is all nonsense. We observe and participate all the time - we can do both, enter into lives. Learnt from Sarah. Each time closer and more involved. Prepared to help and involved particularly with Dilmaya. My 'sister', about 10 years younger. Lived in her house, the subject of my fieldwork - very close relationship.

I became emotionally involved, not just anth. fieldwork but refreshing myself from Cambridge.

Second thing, was cameras. Took a little film in 1968. After video revolution, from 1988, my role was filming. Much cannot be captured in words - but in film (e.g. rituals, crafts etc).

A film archive of one Gurung village - about 160 films. On Youtube - on honey hunting. Ayabaya site. Virtual Village in Himalayas. One on fieldwork. Film very detailed.

Third thing: usually fieldwork is one point in time, coming back many times, Sarah's work on censuses and maps, shows how it changes. Every person who born, married etc. over 43 years. Changes in fields etc. Diaries and accounts.

Turned from one year study to a social history of a village - because I am a social history, including the 500 years of Earls Colne - gathered all these records and putting into a Database, so we can deposit the archives. 200 years hence the social history of one village over 50 years. Social historian.

Changes in theoretical frameworks: those of us who came in 1960's - from Britain, a jumble of ideas - a mixture of Marxism and modernization theory. Very simple framework. History in stages - HG, Tribal, Peasants, Industrial Societies. In Marxism the stages. We didn't doubt that would happen.

Where would Nepal fit in this? Gurungs moving from shepherds down to settled peasants. Waiting to next stage to capitalism and urban.

Other framework of Thomas Malthus. His framework and central argument. Resources arithmetic, population geometrically. Inevitable crash. Taught this in LSE etc.

Pure Malthusian situation in Thak - steep mountains, forests. Population growing very fast - doubling in 55 years. Central prediction of my book, Nepal and Gurungs were facing disaster of ecological kind. Made predictions.

When came back in 1986 - hadn't happened. The forests not gone. Out-migration had happened, had not seen growth of Pokhara and overseas work. Split, half stayed in village, rest around the world. A virtual village around the world.

Social sciences completely incapable of predicting the future - past trends and predict into the future. But many things invisible. Popper's proof - we don't know what we will know.

No-one could have predicted mobile phones - three per household, ringing up America, ring up the bottom of the field.

Rang up the shaman to come down. Chaos theory - butterflies wing. Imagine the butterfly of China and India which will alter everything in Nepal. Impossible to predict.

Modernization and stage theory is not true - we adapt and mix, a new recipe out of old ingredients.

A few of the changes:

Still a pre-wheel economy, jeeps etc. ,but rapid decline in animals. No sheep through village. Diet had changed. Less milk and meat - grain.

Witchcraft and shamanism changed - rise of jhankri instead.

Mobile phone jhankri.

Singing and dancing gone - ghatto gone. Dance film.

No schools when we first went - rise of schools. Electricity and the road. Local government office.

Becoming a suburb of Pokhara. Less singing and dancing in the evenings.

Sadness - Sliding Down Hill in c. 2000. Soon nothing left except old and poor. Proportion of Gurungs changed hugely. Originally 1 Brahmin family, now 19 etc. Magars, Blacksmiths etc.

Proportion of Gurungs from 95% to 32%.

Village still there and if you walk through it, does not seem very different. Culture flowing downhill.

No longer dance, farm etc. The Gurungs disappearing - individuals in mass societies. In the last ten years this is still part of modernization theory. Gurung friends in Pokhara and in London etc, you find that not disappearing, just continued on their long migration. From fisherman in north China - Kokonor, four or five thousand years ago. Then through Tibet and became shepherds, perhaps 2000 years ago, then down to Manang and to Kohla Songbre. Started to grow crops about 1000 years ago. Then to Sikles, then 250 village above village - buckwheat and maize and millet and animals.

Then to Thak, then around my time started to Pokhara and now to Britain etc. More Gurungs from Thak in Britain. Each time they do not stop being Gurungs - their attitudes, beliefs etc. are carried with them.

Deeper continuity of their lives, interested in historical continuities, where everything changes on the surface, e.g. in England - language, laws, political systems, social structure, family system continuous. The same with Japan - deep continuities, huge changes on the surface, but deep note continues. Maruyama

Masao's deep note not really changed - a shamanic civilization - story of Kenichi as ' am a shaman'.

Political philosophy of Tocqueville - French Revolution did not change France. The point of origin - early events in their history. America is England.

Why not the case with the Gurungs - a Gurung home, how people eat, treat each other etc. Eating with their hands, bringing up children etc.

Ruth Benedict on patterns of early socialization determines your life. Japanese and Gurungs very long breastfeeding until next child is born - sleep with baby beside you etc. Very close physically. Children push their children away etc.

At personal and civilizational level, a lot of continuity - the wonderful Gurungs have not disappeared.

Interview by Tek Gurung and Hikmat Khadka in Thak in 2014

The film can be seen at:

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2574126>

Questions from Tek Gurung

What made me come to Nepal for the first time, and then again and again. Understanding history by living in a pre-industrial society etc. Assam background.

Why I did a second Ph. D. in anthropology, and why I keep coming back. Making a social history of a Himalayan community to compare to English villages. Emotional reasons for coming back. Some elaboration of the reasons for working in the village and coming back - the comparative discipline of anthropology and need to go to a very different society to see what is common to humans. Comparison of West, Nepal, Japan and China.

Questions from Hikmat Khadka

What are the main changes in the village? The mobile phone, electricity, driving to the village, running water. Impossible to predict the communications revolution which has reached the village.

Change from a Gurung to a Dalit village - the old Gurung culture almost all gone, including the shaman. Only a few Gurung households. From Tibeto-Burman to Aryan village. Especially from 1990's. Future unpredictable.

Why is 'Letters to Lily' such a special book for you? Reasons for writing 'Letters', Gerry Martin, Lily and the questions children ask. Answers partly based on experience in the Himalayan village. Method of writing the 'Lily' book, very much like making a distilled drink. A 'grandfather' in China; writing 'Master's Letters for Young Chinese'.

Which is my favourite book. The importance of 'The Origins of English Individualism'. Freeing myself from my inherited paradigm.

Reflections on forty-five years of change in Thak

Alan Macfarlane (May 2016)

I am honoured to be invited to write a short piece for the Thak Samaj celebration and my wife Sarah and I wish all my dear friends and family from the village all happiness and success.

Early days in Thak: 1968-1970 - omitted here

Change in the Village: 1986-2001 - omitted here

Changes since 2006

We were able to return again to Thak in 2006, when the Maoist troubles were over. We have been back four times since then. These years have seen the changes to 2001 increase in speed. Life has been transformed in many ways.

The communications with the outside world have been revolutionized by the mobile phone. The knowledge of the wider world has been changed by television. Both cell phones and television, as well as a life with lighting, have been hugely changed by the arrival of mains electricity. The electricity is intermittent but the building of a small hydro-electric power station by the Chinese at the Modi Kola will alter this again. Whether this will mean that light industries can be set up in Thak awaits to be seen.

It seemed impossible that a motorable road could ever be built up to Thak. The first attempt, taking the road along the river, was washed away. Yet amazingly a road was built and opened in 2008 and each year it has been improved. This means that goods and people flow into and through the village and there is even a bus service. In some ways the village is now a rather distant suburb of Pokhara. The road means that it is now feasible to grow fruit and vegetables or rear animals in the village for the Pokhara market. The road also means that the old trekking route through Thak is no longer used, for walkers do not want to walk up a motorable road. Yet it is rumoured that a new trek up through the magnificent Thak forest is planned and this may bring benefits to the village.

Certainly the village in 2014, when we last visited it, looked not too different to that in which I arrived in 1968. Apart from tin roofs, TV aerials and a new water pipe, and the road, it looks roughly the same, though more of the fields have gone out of cultivation and more houses are empty. What it will look like in another 45 years will be fascinating to contemplate.

The future

Meanwhile the difficulties of Nepal in general – the earthquakes, the paralysed and unstable government, the shutting of the orders to trade for long periods, makes life more difficult. It is impossible to predict which way things will go in the future. The rumoured building of an International Airport in Pokhara may revive life in the village. The energetic support of China with its 'One Belt One Road' policy may likewise inject new energy into the hills. Or the downward movement and overseas labour migration may grow ever greater.

In 1969, 80 out of the 100 central households were Gurung; currently there are only 14 Gurung households in this area, most of them consisting of one or two elderly Gurungs. There are only 30 Gurung households in the wider area of Thak. If present trends continue, there will be hardly any Gurungs left in the village in ten or twenty years.

Fifty years from first arrival

Some first thoughts after week's re-visit to Nepal and Thak

(25.10.17)

1. Kathmandu, despite earthquake, much better state - except traffic & roads which are appalling. The streets are cleaner. Hooting has been successfully banned. The place feels more prosperous. There is continuous electricity (after load shedding of up to 18 hours a day) thanks to anti-corruption drive of a Tamang. This has also affected the whole of Nepal – certainly Pokhara. Houses are very expensive - comparable prices to Lode.
2. Pokhara as above - a huge amount of building, traffic jams, but a general an air of prosperity and a buzz about the place. The Chinese (e.g. proposed regional international airport is still scheduled for about four years. We saw only a few tourists, but were not in tourist areas.
3. Our family in Pokhara seemed very well & lively. We sat them all - but missed Bhuwansing. I.B. looked very well and still working on Gurung history and shamanism. T.P.L.S. still quite lively, but no-one, we were told, is really working on the old Gurung legends etc. They had several rather vague proposals for setting up a Shaman School, but not very realistic, sadly.
5. Went up- to Thak for one night - terrible roads - full of rocks & mud. Village and fields looked much the same, but only after a while did we notice the silence - not even radios, let alone children, dogs, chickens etc. Hardly saw an animal or human being aged under 20.
Only three or four Gurung families in the main village, including Budibahadur and Kaji.
There was an 'ama party' dance in the evening - enlivened by our presence and dancing, but just a sad rump of shreds and patches reminding us of the old day. Almost all the elderly or Tailors and Blacksmiths.
Evening meal by electric light and food cooked on a Calor gas stove and no wood fire felt somewhat flat.
In general, a great sadness & every step & tree brought back memories of the Dilmaya days, echoes of faces & voices, of dancing, happiness, sadness. Is it wise to go back again I wonder?

If Tek & Anita & Syana and Om had not been with us, it would have been very dreary.

Who knows what the future holds, all prophecies are vain. But it could pull back. The Gurungs in general have not sold their houses, though much of their land has gone to 'bhanjo' (waste) which may not be a total tragedy as we saw in a neighbouring village (Armalla) how quickly the fields turned into forest again).

They are trying cardamom on the Brahmin fields and some coffee at Naide field and there are a few green-houses and tomatoes. If the road was surfaced, it would only take 30 minutes to Pokhara & there now a good electricity supply, so it could become a supplier for a rapidly growing Pokhara.

Considering what I have learnt from Thak, one way to think of this is to consider how much less rich our lives would have been if we had not had this long and deep immiseration in a very different culture. It touched parts of our hearts and spirit which nothing else could have reached. It has provided a usually invisible background to all the rest of my work. For example, the work on Japanese shamanism and before that English individualism.

It has been a huge effort some 21 visits to Nepal over the fifty years with all the attendant expense and organization and re-adjustment. But it has been an enormous, humbling and unique educational experience.

A few extracts from the diary of our visit to Thak in 2017

Notes on our trip to the village in 2017

22.10.2017 Pokhara

Heard from Syana that Totra is growing coffee at Naide and they are growing tea at Siklis, Syana thought tea would grow well in their old fields at Payan as it faces south and doesn't get the hail from the Himalayas. He has planted three lemon trees and an avocado at Garedi. Interesting to see how they are thinking of cash crops rather than staples.

Guests arrived from Yanjakot ... they no longer do the Ghatto in Yanjakot as the Guru Aba is dead and no one could follow him. Also the Maoists banned it, so we saw some of the last performances, and luckily Alan filmed them. They still do the Krishna Salitra.

24.10.2017 Thak

Had a long drive by jeep up to Thak. At the beginning, the road was OK but once we turned off onto the Siklis road (the other part goes to Sabi and Tangting), it got worse and worse. Much worse than we remember it in 2014, so instead of consolidating and improving on the initial effort whatever management there is has done nothing. It was hairy, and the sky became darker threatening rain. Eventually we did reach the top and walked down to Thak before the rain started. Superficially it looked the same but so much quieter.

Wanted to wander round but were stopped by rain initially. We did manage a walk along the Kwonme terrace - now all tailors except for Badrasing's, which was empty as usual. Bolbahadur's is now occupied by Debiram, the tailor with a sweet face whose daughter burnt her stomach as a child. We cut through to the upper path where Airbahadur still has a shop.

We walked to the Kot and a new shrine built by the mothers. We did not get to the Blacksmith village but the whole place was eerily quiet. Very few Gurungs left. Budibahadur and wife still here as it is too expensive to build on the land they have near Syana. Gunjabahadur and son are still at House24 but hardly made an appearance. Minbahadur (H94) and Gumbahadur (H95) are still at Puje.

At supper noticed they cook by gas and sit under electric light. Sadly, the fire was not lit so the old warmth was lacking but the lungs of the families must be less affected than before. Power costs c.80rs per month, which is very low.

After supper, the mothers came to dance - though grandmothers would be more accurate - and there was only a sprinkling of younger people. Although they should not drum at this time for fear of bringing down hail, Urkashi did drum and they sang the old songs and danced - but such a thin group now. Thak is shrinking fast and there is little likelihood of it ever returning to its old vibrancy. Made me melancholy as there is little left for us to come back for, and nothing if Budibahadur and Urkashi left.

25.102017 Thak

Sad at not being woken by chicken, dogs, 'kuni donva' or calling of mothers and children's chatter. There are now only 30 children

in the school and at the little school near the Magar house, 10-15 in class 1-3. This figure explains why we only saw mainly grandmothers last night. The young wives with children have moved to Pokhara and elsewhere living on remittances from their husbands. We learnt that there were many divorces among them now as the men were away for such a long time with only brief holidays every 2 or so years, like Om.

After a cup of tea we walked down to the 'chautara' on the way to the Brahmin houses and saw the snow-covered mountains with clouds rising which would later eclipse the sight. Syana mentioned that Kimbahadur's son runs a small shop next to Majina's house (27). Sherbahadur and Gomaya still live at House52A. Kaji Kamari has left the house we bought her (73B) and has moved to Pokhara with her son Kimprasad. One sign of life was at Danaram's (H50) where they are growing tomatoes under plastic and we saw Motilal and a few other tailors making their way down by Buje Deorali to cut the first rice in Sabi. Hollo is 'banjo'(deserted). At Kongon someone still does teka for Gunga but that is all of their land they still cultivate. We saw a couple harvesting millet for Chandrasing (H3) in a field near the big swing tree at Buje Deorali. Everywhere the trees we saw planted on the slopes are now very big, even those we filmed Premkumari and Syana in long ago, so the view down to Uli etc. is gone. Even the sound of the river has been muted as the water is sent into pipes to feed the hydro-electric plant which is now finished. We could hear it a bit as the rainy season has just ended, but no roar as before and the trees close all those views we loved.

Tek says tree cover is good, and in some sense that is true, but for us it signals a village in terminal decline. Beside the shrine at Buje Deorali, Majina put up a water tank in memory of her husband, Kumbasing 12 years ago, but the tap is, as ever, broken and the bricks are rotting. However, the mothers rebuilt the shrine a few years ago.

28.10.2017

Early breakfast then Anita drove Tek, Abbinah, Durga, Syana, Alan and I to the airport. Very sad to leave Nepal even though immediately after returning from Thak I could not imagine returning there again.

**What I have learnt from fifty years of visits as an
anthropologist to Nepal**
(1968-2017)

Talk given to Social Science Bahar in Kathmandu on 27th
October 2017.

The outline of the talk which can be seen at:
<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/media/2612516>

Introduction:

My background and how I came to work in Nepal and the village of Thak in December 1968. First fieldwork and twenty subsequent visits. Main features of my early work.

What I have learnt of 'the Other' from visiting Nepal

One central aim of anthropology is to take us out of our own culture and society. Some of the things I learnt was:

The shock of living in a pre-wheel economy and admiration for the immense labour involved.

The second shock encountering a village which was effectively living outside a State.

The third shock, what the modern world is. My world taught me that the individual came first, the group later. I had to separate my religious, political, social and economic life. All this is reversed in a Gurung village.

One aspect of this is expressed in the unique in Himalayas (including China) in preserving their shamanic traditions in detail, recorded oral culture in whole of Himalayas. The experience helped me to understand Japan too.

How the World Works

Anthropology is based on the assumption that all human beings are, at a deep psychological level, the same. I discovered this to be true, especially in my friendship with a hill woman, my 'sister' Dilmaya Gurung.

I discovered that anthropology is an art and not a science; however well we know a place we cannot predict its future.

I discovered the strength of culture, rejecting my Marxist and modernization 'stages' theories and finding that beneath immense

changes the Gurungs, (like the English and the Japanese), hold on to their deep culture even when everything appears to change.

What I have learnt about myself.

I arrived as someone from a long family line of white imperialists and I was trained through my education to take on the role of a representative of the British empire. Through the years I forgot this early background and training and became absorbed in the world of another family, my adopted one in Nepal.

I was taught that anthropology is an objective science, with observation privileged above participation. Through the years I reversed this and learned to relax into the society.

I learnt that I am still very much a historian, I found fieldwork very difficult - ill, lonely, not a word of the language, the disordered life of an anthropologist. But while I went back into history, I tried to preserve both disciplines. I learnt that anthropology without history is superficial, history without anthropology is provincial.

The experience has been so rich and interesting, watching a world change over fifty years from the inside, that I wanted to share it. I found the conventional methods – writing books and articles – frustrating, so my solution is to combine film and photographs with text; books with films embedded, or films with books as metatexts. I have tried to explain, with films, what an anthropologist actually does in the field, and even more importantly, what he or she does in their head when they 'write up'.

Conclusion:

Some fifty years from 1968 to 2017, some twenty visits, over three years in a Gurung village, and at least the same period thinking and writing about the Gurungs, have changed me. Sarah and I found the experience the deepest of our adult lives. We were enormously impressed by the Gurung people, their character and their resilience and have been delighted to find the same characteristics which enchanted us among the numerous people we have met in the homeland of the Gurungs - namely China.

Video Films to accompany this book.

There are films to accompany this book which can be accessed in two ways.

On the Streaming Media Service of Cambridge University:

Fieldwork with the Gurungs:

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1764743>

Ritual and Religion of the Gurungs of Nepal:

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1640057>

The Physical World of the Gurungs:

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1670436>

The Social World of the Gurungs:

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1708041>

Dilmaya's World: <https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1699773>

Interviews of Dilmaya Gurung in 1992:

<https://upload.sms.cam.ac.uk/collection/1679096>

Some of the films are up on 'Youtube' at: 'Virtual Village in the Himalayas'

<http://tinyurl.com/y7ccn8hw>



Brief bibliography

- Macfarlane, Alan, *Resources and Population. A Study of the Gurungs of Nepal* (1976, 2nd edn., 2003, Ratna Pustak, Kathmandu)
- Macfarlane, Alan and Gurung, Indrabahadur, *Guide to the Gurungs* (1992)
- McHugh, Ernestine, *Love and Honor in the Himalayas; Coming to Know Another Culture* (Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 2001)
- Messerschmidt, Donald A. *The Gurungs of Nepal: Conflict and Change in a Village Society* (London, 1976)
- Moisala, Pirkko, *Cultural Cognition in Music; continuity and Change in the Gurung Music of Nepal* (1991)
- Pettigrew, Judith, *Maoists at the Hearth; Everyday Life in Nepal's Civil War* (2013)
- Pignède, Bernard, *The Gurungs* (Paris, 1966; translated by Sarah Harrison and Alan Macfarlane, published by Ratna Pustak, Kathmandu, 1992)
- Strickland, Simon, 'Beliefs, Practices and Legends: A Study in the Narrative Poetry of the Gurungs of Nepal' (Cambridge University Ph.D. thesis, 1982).

Acknowledgements

With many thanks to all our Gurung family and friends and particular to those involved in the preparation and execution of Dilmaya Gurung's pae.

Most of the preparation of films and texts behind this booklet was done by Sarah Harrison, including indexing the films and keeping the diary. Alan Macfarlane did the filming and the final preparation of this work.

The book and films were carefully checked by Bikash Gurung to whom many thanks for this and help in many ways. Tek and Anita Gurung also made useful comments. Lt. I.B. Gurung and Colonel John Cross gave much advice over the years.

My adopted family in Nepal and England, especially Lt. Bhuwansing Gurung and his relatives, including Manu Gurung and my deceased sister Dilmaya Gurung, were of primary importance in helping us to become absorbed into Gurung life.

I also acknowledge with gratitude the help of various organizations and funding bodies: King's College, Cambridge and the University of Cambridge, the Economic and Social Research Centre, George and Laura Appell and the Firebird Trust, Gerry Martin and the Renaissance Trust, Professor Mark Turin and Digital Himalaya, Zilan Wang and the Cambridge Rivers Project.