

Cultural Identity!

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Dr. Tulsi R. Maharjan

We live in a time when social distinctions as well as ethnic, racial and class differences have become even more critical to the way in which people identify themselves, experience the world around them, and make meaning of everyday life.

Our disconnections from one another have become more important to some and more threatening to others than they have been at any other time in the last half-century. Rather than simply understanding these differences as something imposed on us, many people have embraced their differences as desirable, singular, and superior to those of people outside their immediate social orbits. As much as we live in an age celebrated for the renewal of democracy, we also live in an age that celebrates the social, and racial differences that separate us from one another.

As I learn more about my own culture and accept the traditions, heritage, language, religion, thinking patterns, and social structure, I have not be able to internalize the beliefs, values and norms of my culture and identify myself as part of my own culture. Is that because, I have never able to develop my own cultural identity?

It seems to me that I have been searching for my own true cultural identity. Or is that I am just getting old? My interest and curiosity has increased 100 percent to learn about my own cultural heritage. My cultural identity search began rapidly as my kids grew up and they started to ask all kinds of questions about culture and I also wanted teach them about the my culture.

Since I think, I know who I am and what is my culture is all about I have stopped internalizing other's negative perceptions about my culture. My desire t learn about and interest in learning more in-depth has given me self-confidence and positive outlook about my culture. At least now, I can say, "My culture is important to me and I am proud of what I am. Our culture has many special things to offer to me". As I learn more about the Mha Puja and its uniqueness around the world, I am sharing

story about the unique Mha puja with everyone. I suppose, if you were not proud of this event you would not have shares with others. There are many these special events in our culture and we should be proud of it.

Living in a multicultural society, we have a greater opportunity to interact with persons from different cultures and that triggers an awareness of our own cultural identities. Since my long search for my cultural identity and knowing all the significant things these events offer, I have been able to filter other's culture through my own and see the positive differences.

Since the cultural identities are dynamic, we must constantly reexamine where we are and who we are. I see many people stuck with their own ideology and not being able to see the other side of the story. I once read story and quote which says " I have not been the same since I saw the moon shine in the other side of the world".

We must be able to see from different perspectives so that we will have broader perspective on every thing. There will be always nay Sayers and we must overcome and show them that there are more than one way to dissect things.

We have the opportunity to see the differences in this society and lets take this opportunity and give our young generation a chance to be multifaceted. As one of the slogan said" Newahjhi newah he jui" Newars will be always newars. So I think it is important for us to learn about other culture and customs as well. so that we can be more broad and open minded citizen of the world.

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President's Message

On behalf of Nepa Pasa Pucha Amerikaye I would like to welcome all of you to celebrate our ninth annual Bhintuna celebration.

NPPA has been quite active last year trying to develop collaborative partnership with different sister organizations and sponsoring our own "Cultural Heritage Day" in Rockville Maryland.

NPPA held its first ever seminar on Saturday, August 12, 2000 at King Farms Community Center in Rockville. Participants came from California, Oregon, Ohio, North Carolina, New Jersey and New York to talk about issues related to Newah culture, history, language and tradition. It was a great success.

We are thankful to Mr. Daya Sakya, Prof. Mohan Shrestha, Prof. Devendra Amatya, Mrs. Bijaya Shrestha, Mrs. Amrit Tuladhar and all past presidents of NPPA, Mr. Ram Malakar, Mr. Tribhuban Tuladhar, Dr. Tulsi R. Maharjan and Mr. Bhagat Lal Shrestha. Special thanks go to Mr. Ram Malakarji for his surprise Shamhebaji and Tribhuvan Tuladharji for his 10th Anniversary's plan proposal. I would like to express our gratitude to Royal Nepalese Ambassador, Sri Damodar Gautam for his participation and remarks on tradition and culture of Kathmandu Valley.

NPPA continues to cooperate with other Nepalese organizations. NPPA represented at the National convention of ANA. We went to Atlanta during the joint convention of international Nepalese organizations from July 1-3, 2000. I conducted a session on "Cultural Heritage of Nepal". Prof. Mohan Narayan Shrestha, Prof. Yogendra Gonchhe, Dr. Maheswarananda Baidya, Mr. Beda Joshi, Mrs. Vijaya Shrestha, Mrs. Amrit Tuladhar, Mrs. Saroj Prajapati, Rajendra Shrestha and myself spoke on various topics of culture, Newah tradition, festivals and rites and rituals. The response from the audience was great and resounding.

We are planning to have our 10th anniversary celebration by organizing an international conference on "Newah Cultural Heritage" during Labor Day weekend of 2001 in the vicinity of Washington DC. We are expecting scholars from all over the world to participate in this program. Please visit our NPPA website for more information.



We are also in the process of looking into creating our own cultural center to house our Newah culture resources. Our success will depend on your support and cooperation. There is nothing impossible if we try hard to raise funds from friends and International agencies.

On behalf of NPPA I would like to thank everyone who has helped to make this Bhintuna celebration enjoyable and successful. Once again we wish you all the best of health, prosperity, peace and success on the happy occasion of New Year 1121 and Nhudaya Bhintuna.

President,
Dibya R. Hada

Phoolbari Cultural Club of Washington DC

Saroj Prajapati

Blessed with the diversity of many cultures and traditions, most Nepali have amazing talents in folk dances and music even though they are living far from their homeland. When we (my parents and my three siblings) came to this country in the early 80's, only few Nepali families were living in the Washington-Metro area.

America-Nepal Society (ANS) was the only Nepali organization and ANS gatherings made main events for the Nepali and friends of Nepal. As a child growing up in Nepal, we had many opportunities to observe the Nepali cultures and tradition. Fortunately, our parents (Mr. Ram Malakar and Mrs. Bisnu Malakar) devoted their time to the culture of Nepal and Nepali people in the Washington area. They also encouraged us to learn more about Nepali cultures, in particular dances and music. Father also performed in many programs of ANS, ANA and AMMA annual conventions. We siblings continued on their footsteps in preserving the culture of Nepal. We started to perform dances in the Washington Area since 1983.

Although we all had desire to perform on the stage, we never had any professional training; so presentations were not as professional as they are now. Most dances were learned on our own with Nepali beats, especially with Jhaure and with Nepali movie songs. In the fall of 1983, we were invited through Nepalese Embassy to perform in the International Cultural Festival in Washington, D.C. There were hardly any good dancer or musician available at that time. Somehow, we all participated and had a blast. The performers were Magan Shrestha (daughter of Mr. Indra Lal Shrestha), Shanta and Kanta Ghimire (Daughters of Mr. and Mrs. Rajendra Ghimire) and my brother and sisters (Shanti, Sheila and Subarna). As a young generation of the New Nepali family in the area, our parents, all the Nepali families and friends encouraged us. Since then Nepali artists participated in many International Programs and ANS programs.

Around the time of 25th Anniversary of ANS and 1st National Convention of ANMA, Mr. Jay Nanda Lama, a well-known professional singer, dancer and actor

from Nepal came to DC area. He coached and encouraged all of us to participate in many cultural programs. He changed Nepali cultural shows amazingly with the live music, folk and classical dances and folk songs. About the same time late Mr. Indra Lal Shrestha, a well-known Tabla player and Nepali singer also came to the US with his daughter Sujan Shrestha, another talented dancer. With both Lama and Shrestha's undivided support and unbelievable talents in Nepali culture, the cultural programs started to generate more attractions from second generation of Nepali. Most parents came forward by bringing their children and showed their enthusiasm toward the Nepali dances and music. Mr. Lama returned to Nepal after two years but he gave us unforgettable lessons on Nepali culture and traditions.

With all these happenings, we felt the need to form a club for organizing programs in a systematic manner. In December 1994 Phoolbari Cultural Club was created with the support of Mrs. Vijaya Shah (then ANS President) and the executive members (I was also a Vice president at that time). The club was established under ANS to serve cultural need of all the Nepalese living in USA.

So far this club had entertained thousands of people at Nepali conventions and many International shows in the different states such as Columbus (Ohio), Bowling Green (Ohio), Big Rapids (Michigan), Atlanta (Georgia), Hartford (Connecticut), New Jersey, New York, Boston (MA), Greensboro (North Carolina), Jacksonville (Florida), Harrisonburg (Virginia), Washington, DC and Maryland.

At the initial phase, Sujan Shrestha with her choreographic skill developed the new phase of Nepali culture programs. At the same time Mr. Indra Lal Shrestha, Prabodh Shrestha, Krishna Prajapati, Gita Prajapati with amazing musical talents, Subarna Malakar, Shanti Shrestha, Manish Pokahrel, D.B. Tamang and Narayan Kharel with their unique dance skills, and of course the young artists like Arjoo Bhandari, Promita Prajapati, Pukar Shrestha, Puja Tamang and many others who made this club proud in many Nepali and International programs.

This club had been active for more than six years and has grown astonishingly. Currently we are one of the well-known Nepali cultural clubs in the US. Our members and participants come from various backgrounds. Our culture is something to be proud of, for it defines who we are and where we will take it into the future.

PHOOLBARI CULTURAL CLUB

Established in December 1994, Phoolbari cultural club introduces Nepal's diverse cultural environment in the United States of America. "Phoolbari" means a garden with variety of flowers and those flowers are the amazing talents of Nepali, Nepali-American (adults and children) living in the USA. Its main goal is to represent Nepali culture in America and teach about our rich proud history and culture. We firmly believe in the power of knowledge and the enrichment of the talents in every one of us when they are exposed to different cultures and experiences.

How to get involved?

To get involved you first must become a member or participant. During and prior to the cultural programs, the participants will meet regularly for planning and practicing of the forthcoming events. Anyone is welcome to join for FREE. As member and participant, you can help new members by forming committees and teaching them the goals of Phoolbari. Such committees are need especially during our culture shows. We encourage parents to come forward and let their children learn our rich culture. All participants develop new skills; confidence and perspective, which will help them, create a different way of viewing our culture. We also strive to create a balance between social and cultural events for our supporters.

Our vision for the club in the new millennium is to expand its horizons to new and more innovative ideas. We are in the process of creating a web site in hopes of carrying the traditions for generations to come. We hope to furnish general information to our supporters through the web site. Please feel free to e-mail us with the comments or suggestions at Phoolbari94@hotmail.com.

So come and join us be part of the next generation's exciting member of Phoolbari Cultural Club.

Matya Jatra

This is a typical Buddhist festival of Newah of community in Patan Valley. In Newah language it means the festival of lights. Matya Jatra begins early in the morning on the third day of the dark fortnight of Shrawan (August).

One of the most fascinating features of this festival is a long parade of the enthusiastic shrine-walkers who go round all the Buddhist shrines scattered in and around the city of Patan. In Patan along there are more than 1300 Buddhist shrines. The number of the shrine-walkers who colorfully form this impressive parade is around three to four thousands. Men and women both participate in this festival. They carry varieties of interesting gifts to make offerings to Lord Buddha. The offerings of rice grains, flowers, red powders, sweets, incense and guru patra (a gift cup for guru) are quite common things to offer to God. However, the offering of oil or butter lamps to Lord Buddha on this auspicious day is a dominant feature. It is interesting to note that the majority of the shrine-walkers are the lamp offerers to the shrines. Offering lamps in particular to the Buddha on this day is said to signify great enlightenment obtained by overcoming the Maras (temptations).

There is a very interesting story about the origin of this festival. Once Shakya Muni Gautama was in deep meditation to attain Nirvana. The Maras, awfully jealous of His determination came down to distract Him. They came disguising themselves in different forms. Some were in the form of fierce-looking demons and some in apsara forms (damsels) and so on. They all made every possible attempt to seduce Him but all failed. In the long run Shakya Muni overcame the Maras and became Buddha, the enlightened one. It is said that later on the Maras came to confess their sins to Lord Buddha and worshipped Him with great honor. Ever since this festival is believed to have come into existence to mark this great day.

The expression of this fantastic story can be found in this festival. All those devil dancers and the apsara actors and several other funny mask-wearers who are the part and parcel of this festival parade are said to represent the Maras. This parade is always accompanied by several groups of musicians playing various kinds of traditional Nepalese musical instruments. The route prescribed for this parade to pass through

looks quite confusing yet accepted as the most perfect short cut. This parade is supposed to move on in an unbroken chain. This is the only way for all the shrine-walkers not to get lost before they complete their religious journey. The route map for the entire parade is a leading group of musicians who always go ahead of the parade playing special music. People here are not used to the maps.

The responsibility of organizing this parade goes to each of those neighborhoods once in every ten years. There is a very interesting tradition according to which the sponsoring Tole of this parade must train a team of traditional drum-players who are expected to display every best skill they have when they are asked to perform in the public on this day. The name of these drummers team is known as Naubaja Khalah. They perform this show in a very special way only at the member Toles devoted to this Matya festival. It is quite exciting to see the way they go round the town and perform this typical musical show with great enthusiasm. Some of the drums that are, used for the occasion are richly decorated that people sometimes mistaken them temple treasures.

The most enjoyable part of this festival parade for the children is the devil dancers and funny mask-wearers. Many of those participants are clad from head to foot all in worn-out sacks and rags. Whenever they come across the inquisitive kids they suddenly jumping in a dramatic way try to scare them away. The kids who are too slow to get the fun always stay away from the scene and those who are smart enough to push themselves in the front never wait to tease those devil dancers and enjoy themselves to their -heart's content.

Buddhists have a tremendous respect for this festival and so they celebrate it with great feasts and fun. They seem to have attached a great deal of significance to this day which as they believe is an unforgettable day as all the Maras surrendered themselves to Lord Buddha and confessed their sins paying tribute to the all-compassionate Lord Buddha.

Yala, Patan, Lalitpur

Some eight kilometers south of central Kathmandu situated on a plateau across the Bagamati river is a lovely little city called Lalitpur meaning the city fine arts.

This city also known as Patan-once an independent Newah kingdom before the present dynasty took over-is best known for its rich artistic heritage.

The city of Lalitpur divides into 22 municipal wards and is inhabited by roughly 160,000 people. A substantial portion of its population is in various trades, especially in traditional crafts and small-scale family industries. Lalitpur, in fact is the only town in all Nepal that has produced the highest number of famous artists and finest craftsmen ever recorded Nepalese art history. The most famous Newar arts and master craftsman, like Arniko and Abhand Siddhi Raj, were all born in Lalitpur.

This city was designed and built after the Buddhist Dharma Chakra (the wheel of righteousness). It is surrounded by four big stupas - one at each corner of its cardinal points. The Indian emperor Ashoka built these monuments when he came to the Kathmandu Valley on his pilgrimage tour some 2,250 years ago. When we look at the size and shape of these stupas they in many ways seem to breathe their antiquity in a real sense. It is interesting to note there are more than 1,200 Buddhist monuments of various shapes and sizes scattered in and around this city alone. However, the most important monumental center of this city is of course, Patan Durbar Square, which has been recognized by UNESCO as a World Heritage site.

Patan Durbar Square is the only monumental area in all three cities that stand out with its most magnificent architectural splendour and unique artistic beauty. Patan has gone through many socio-political changes, however, this city has preserved its glorious cultural heritage and the history of it finest craftsmanship.

Lalitpur is said to have been, founded by King Veera Deva in 299 A.D. This city has had many old names such as Yala, Yupagrama, Lalitpatan, Manigla, Lalit krain, Lilitwesta and Lalitpuri. Historical records plus many other legends, also indicate that Patan is the oldest of all three cities of Kathmandu Valley.

According to a very old Kirat chronical edited by noted researcher and scholar Prem Bahadur Subba,



Kirati rulers founded Patan long before the Lichhavi rulers came into the Kathmandu Valley. According to Mr. Subba, the earlist known capital of Kirati rulers was Thankot. The capital was most possibly moved to Patan after the Kirati King Yalamber came to power sometime around 2nd century A.D.

One of the most used and typical Newah name of Patan is YALA. It is believed that King Yalamber named this city after himself and ever since then this city was know as YALA.

It seems like the traditional values and cultural beliefs have remained unchanged even though the city is moved into 21st century.

(Article from Visit Patan, 1999)

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From Sandhya Times, Monday, July 10, 2000

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Living the Nepali Way

By Diane Zitek

"I think you can't speak," he whispered politely as I stopped, yet again, to keep my heart from exploding. I wised up to his diplomacy after the first hour of our hike. Ganga, my appointed guide, would periodically ask me a question only to test my aerobic capacity to force out words. The query was subterfuge. The real question, in both our minds, was my strength and will to hike from Beni to Nangi in one day. The 5,000-foot elevation gain was a cinch for even geriatric Nepalese who live in the remote village of Nangi, 7,300 feet high in the Himalayas. Old ladies with 50-pound sacks of rice strapped to their backs would pass me all day, smile as if they were strolling in the park. They'd make the trip in 6 or 7 hours - Nepalese time. Carrying only my bodyweight, a mere 110 pounds, I would wearily reach Nangi in just under 11 hours-AARP Time.

But I asked for this torture. Methodically sought it out. After two organized trekking trips to Nepal, I wanted something different, a chance to stay in one place, sink my soul into the culture that kept calling me back. And, for bragging rights, I had hoped for a little colorful misery.

After months of searching for travel options, I discovered an intriguing website posted by Mahabir Pun, a man born in Nangi, now completing graduate school at the University of Nebraska. Paradoxically, his use of high tech communication inspired me to embrace a low-tech village flanked by the snow-crueted peaks of Annapurna I, II and Dhaulagiri. Under Mahabir's guidance, villagers had sacrificed to support one of the few high schools in the region. They needed teachers, and I was a teacher. A karmic match. After copious e-mail conversations with Mahabir, I began planing my pilgrimage to Nangi. I would do everything the "Nepali way". No western-camouflaged trail food. No guides to pamper and please me.

Ganga, the current English teacher in Nangi, had been sent to fetch me in Beni, a Deliverance town west of Pokhara, serving as an area supply center and bus hub. No motorized vehicles linked Beni and Nangi. Only footpaths constructed of centuries-old stone steps connected us. Huge muscle straining steps. Jillions of steps. I couldn't avoid them like I had the dreaded Stair Master in my gym all year.

As we left Beni, Ganga spotted Chundra, one of my future 10th grade students, whom he commandeered to carry my 75-pound duffel bag. Chundra had strolled down to Beni the day before to buy kerosene. It seemed like a long way to travel for one item, but I was just learning the Nepali way.

I had one day to recuperate before starting my volunteer assignment - teaching English to grades 7, 8, 9, and 10, six days a week. But the day was not lost without a lesson for me. Several times I had insisted on paying Chundra for carrying my heavy bag only to be told repeated that my debt had already been paid. Coming from a culture where money passes hands freely to absolve the stress of obligation, the concept of trading good deeds seemed sadly foreign. Throughout my stay, I would never see anyone exchange money in Nangi. I would, however, see many good deeds. Young and old carried tons of wood and rocks for miles to build another volunteer house. Everyone cared for each other's children. A steady donation of rice, lentils, potatoes and spinach arrived at my door daily. Students swept the floors of their own classrooms. The list goes on and on.

For the three weeks I lived in Nangi, I occupied the volunteer quarters, called "Round House" for obvious reasons. It sat adjacent to the school and kept me in the thick of activities. Atypical by Nangi standards, it had the only glass windows in the village, along with the only propane two-burner gas stove, flush toilet, and solar water heater. Graciously, I accepted the perks, made concessions to my authenticity standards. The Round House, as well as most other homes, shared the same unreliable electric power, charged up only a few hours a day to illuminate light bulbs and radios.

Each day friendly people would drop in to meet me and ask the ubiquitous question. "How old are you? And, where is your husband?" Two of my least favorite topics, but important information for Nepalese attempting to demonstrate the proper level of respect for my social position in life. Confessing to divorce was much less painful than divulging my age, data I reserve for my doctor and the internal revenue.

Eyebrows always rose when I'd mention divorce. Since females rarely find means to support themselves in Nepal, husbands are generally linked to survival. Women with jobs, who own homes and

travel alone, draw lots of curiosity but no rude questions.

Nangi's school, the pride and joy of villagers, educates children from grades one to ten. The Nepalese government frugally supports students up to grade 6. Higher grades are supported by villagers with a few rupees and lots of sweat equity. The one-story, stone structure wraps around a dirt playground, home to rousing afternoon volleyball games. Royal blue doors, with white grade numbers, stand brightly against the drab gray concrete walls and corrugated tin roof.

Behind the school, sat the "hostels," about two dozen, small wooden structures, resembling American backyard tree houses. Built by the amateur architects who boarded in them, they served as the home-away-from-home for older students who lived farther than an hour's walk from Nangi. Each hut housed two students, two cots, a table for eating and doing homework, plus a corner for firewood and a small area on the floor for cooking. Although flimsy, they stood as a testament to their determination. From my vantagepoint, poor living conditions didn't dampen laughter, singing, and typical teenage shenanigans.

On my second day in Nangi, I began teaching, and learning, the Nepali way. Each period began with students bolting to their feet to release a loud chorus of "Good morning teacher." All embarrassed and humbled, I'd quickly ask them to sit. Classrooms were cold and dark, warmed only by smiling students wearing hats, shawls and gloves. Opening the wooden shutters would let in light accompanied by a brisk Himalayan breeze. Nangi options were simple and few.

No stimulating visual aids adorned the mud-plastered walls. No desk for the teacher stood between the worn blackboard and the students. Kids sat on long wooden benches. A matching narrow table stretched in front of them, holding tattered books and treasured paper. Since children begin English lessons in the third grade, we communicated through slow, simple sentences. Each day we laughed our way through my bastardized lexicon of Nepali phrases and their shyness to speak English. I'd ask probing questions. They'd give me terse answers.

"I'd like to take a vote," I said one morning. "Do you want an arranged marriage or a love marriage." Students had told me of their trips to visit relatives in Pokhara, corrupted by tradition busters, televisions, VCR's, even discos. Many had

seen Titanic and loved Leonardo DeCaprio. Music lyrics and movie kisses filled their heads with romance, love and passion. My polling sought to gauge the Leonardo factor I divided the board into Love Marriage and Arranged Marriage. "How would you vote?" I asked a 9th grader. Everyone snickered.

After a long silence, he whispered to the ground.

"Love."

"And, you?" I asked the next student.

"Love,"

'And you?"

"Love."

"And you?"

"Love."

In the end, eighteen bashfully coerced hatch marks hung below Love Marriage. Zero below Arranged Marriages. "Ah, so you go to Pokhara, watch movies about love and romance, now you want to choose your own husband or wife. What has happened to tradition? Such questions would have spawned heated discussion in American schools, but the Nepali way steered clear of open debate in the classroom. Yet, some traditions still remain deeply entrenched in Nangi, a few with conflicting wisdom for my fiercely independent Western psyche. Take homework and tests, for example. The Nepali approaches both as a group activity. "If I know the answer, why wouldn't I want to help my friend," explained one student. After seeing the benefits of the collective approach to everything from child rearing to building a house, I could hardly argue with the logic.

Eating as a guest in a family's home, however, made me squirm a little more. Volunteers are often invited to dip their fingers into a plate piled high with dal bhatt, lentils and rice. Out of respect, guests are fed first. Eat alone. Fill their bellies to satisfaction. Then the family eats. It was the Nepali way, one that constantly battled with my ingrained version of politeness.

While in Nangi, I made many adjustments to live the Nepali way. Some customs I would leave behind, others I would bring home. Wonderful memories say that I got more than I bargained for, new friends, new perspectives and a bridge that travels between the best of both worlds.

Svanti: the Celebration of Victory over Death

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Introduction

Nepal is not only a land of gods and goddesses with numerous temples and idols, but also a land of feasts and festivals with numerous processions of deities and their worship. The chain of ritual celebration in Nepal is cyclical and it is difficult to render one celebration as the beginning and another as the end. Most people in the Valley consider that the ritual year begins on the day of Gathamugah, the day of expelling ghosts in August, and ends on the day of Sithinakhah, the day of worshipping lineage deities in June. However, many people also take the festival of Svanti or Tihar as the beginning of the ritual cycle in the Valley. The New Year's Day of the Nepal era falls on the fourth day of this festival, which is based on the lunar calendar. Since Nepalese people celebrate almost all their festivals according to lunar calendar the New Year's Day of the Nepal era is an important day. This year 1121-year of Nepal era begins on 28 October 2000. Historians believe that the tradition of celebrating New Year's day and Mhapuja is much older a tradition in Nepal than the Nepal Samvat. Nepalvarsa Kriya Nakhahcakhah Pustakam (a manual to Nepalese Festivals- NKNP) takes the festival of Svanti as the beginning of the ritual cycle in Nepal.

Svanti is one of the national festivals of Nepal celebrated throughout the kingdom by the Hindu and Buddhist population of Nepal. This festival is known by several names: Svanti, Pancaka, Yamapancaka, Tihar and Dipavali. Both 'Tihar' and 'Dipavali' words are derived from the Hindi words 'Tyauhara' and 'Divali.' However, Svanti, Pancaka and Yamapancaka are words from Nepalese origin. The Newar people call the occasion 'Svanti' and celebrate it on their own peculiar way. This festival is rightly called the festival of light, because during this festival people illuminate their houses, streets, quarters, villages, towns and cities with as many lights as possible. On the fourth day of this festival Newar people celebrate their New Year's Day.

During this festival performing dances with melodious songs: bhailo on the third and dyausi on the fourth day is a typical tradition among the Parvates. In the evening of Laksmipuja, singing and dancing bhailo unmarried girls go to the doors of their neighbours, they are treated with delicious foods each house they visited, while in the following evening males perform dyausi. On the fourth day of this festival the Parvate people also perform worship of the Mountain of cow dung (Gobardhan Parvat) and ox (Goru). According to a myth, the lord Krishna began this tradition to commemorate the

day he protected the Braja people of Gokula from Indra's attack by creating a mountain of cow dung (Gobardhan Parvat).

During this festival Yama, the god of death is invoked so it is called 'Yamapancaka' or 'Five days dedicated to Yama.' People presume that during these five days, Yama descends into this world. Yama's messengers like crow and dog are worshipped on the first and second day of this festival. On the third day, cow is worshipped. Although cow is worshipped as Laksmi, the goddess of wealth, she is also respected as an animal associated to the realm of Yama, whose assistance is necessary to people soon after their death to cross the river Baitarani to reach the heaven. Honouring Yama and his messenger Yamadut on the day of Mhapuja and worshipping Yama and his bookkeeper, Citragupta on the day of Kijapuja also indicate the relation of this festival to death. On the day of Mhapuja, Yama is honoured as a protective god while on the day of Kijapuja; he is worshipped as an elder brother and Citragupta as a younger brother. Although he is invoked all five days during this festival many disagree to name this festival "Yamapancaka" because the lofty way of celebrating the worship of Laksmi, worship of the self and worship of brothers have subsided Yama's worship.

The Manual Book of Nepalese Festivals, NKNP suggests to begin this festival by worshipping Ganesa on the first day, Kachalaga (Kartik) Dvadasi, making it a six-day festival. However, in practice people begin this festival on Trayodasi by worshipping crow and consider it a five-day's festival. The worships, which are now popular among the Newars, are:

-Kvapuja (first day): worship of crows, messengers (of Death)

-Khicapuja (second day): worship of dogs

-Sapuja and Laksmi puja (third day): worship of cows and Laksmi, the goddess of wealth

-Mhapuja (fourth day): worship of the self, start of the New Year

-Kijapuja (fifth day): worship of brothers by their sisters

The festival and rituals

1. Kvapuja (first day): worship of crows, messengers (of Death)

On the first day of Yamapancaka, people worship and feed crows. In Newar households, it is common to offer a portion of food first to crow every morning before they eat their own meals in the morning. Crows are believed to be the messengers. They are supposed to carry messages for close relatives and friends from far away places. People assume the crows are delivering messages when they find them crowing. Depending upon the voice of crow people guess whether it is delivering good or bad message. When it crows near the house with a sweet

voice, it is taken as a good message. Sometimes it's crowing is also taken as a hint of the imminent arrival of some guests. However, if the sound is harsh then it is supposed to be the indication of something bad that is going to happen. The crow is also supposed the messenger of Yama, the god of death. People believe that when somebody dies the departed soul (preta) finds its temporary shelter in a crow. At least for the first ten days of the impure period after a death, the departed soul is supposed to reside in a crow. Every morning during the first ten-day's mourning period, the chief mourner has to perform sraddha to offer a rice ball (pinda) and food stuffs to crows in the name of the deceased person.

2. Khicapuja (second day): worship of dogs

The second day of Svanti festival is Khicapuja, the day of worshipping of dogs. This day is dedicated to please the dogs. Not only pet dogs, even wandering dogs are respected and worshipped with flower garlands and delicious foods. The dogs are considered to be the guards at the doors of Yama's place and people believe that their worship help to the soul's passage at the time of one's death. Like the crows, dogs are supposed to be place of retreat for the recently deceased. As is the case with crow, the chief mourner performs sraddha to offer pinda and food stuffs to dog in the name of the deceased during the first ten days after somebody's death. Even when stray dogs intrude the house of the deceased person they are not supposed to be chased away, because people believe that a death person visits his or her house in disguise dogs. Dogs are also regarded as the vehicle of the fearful god, Bhairav and Nasadyo (Natyasvara), the god of dance and drama. They are also seen as gatekeepers of different temples of Kathmandu Valley.

3. Sapuja: (third day) worship of cows as Laksmi and Laksmipuja

Sa or cow is considered to be a representation of Laksmi, the goddess of wealth. On the third day of the festival of Svanti she is worshipped. In the morning, cow is worshipped and fed generously. People believe that her worship bring them good fortune. On this day, people attach sacred threads on the tail of a cow, which they received from the Brahmins on the day of Janaipurnima. People believe that this act enables them to receive cow's support in crossing the river Baitarani, which is said to create frightful barriers to sinful men. To give a cow as a gift to the Brahmins is one of the religious tasks of the Hindus that enable them to curb sins and to help them to reach heaven after their death. For them cow is the most sacred animal and her five products: milk, curd, butter, urine and dung are considered to be pure objects.

Same day in the evening, after the worship of Cow people worships Laksmi, the goddess of wealth. Houses are specifically decorated with lights and made clean to receive her. People believe that she visits only those houses, which are made clean and illuminated. Laksmi has been represented by another word 'Sri' that

means the sum of beauty and betterment, so they also honour her as the goddess Srilaksmi. Since ancient times, the meaning and interpretation of Laksmi has been numerous. Especially eight (astalaksmi) and sixteen (sodsalaksmi) names are invoked to please her during her worship. Traditional painters provide a peculiar picture of a Laksmi: -she has four hands; one of her right hands is carrying a traditional mirror (jvalanhaykam) and another is in abhay mudra; one of her left hands is carrying a vermilion container (sinhammhu) and another is in bara mudra; she is seated on the throne; adorned with glittering dresses and ornaments on her body; wearing a golden crown on her head; her right foot is touching a tortoise and the left one is in padmasana mudra; a Kubera (god of wealth) and two khyah (benevolent ghost) are present her in front.

The preparation for her worship begins early in the morning in every household by smearing every floor with cow dung mixed with red clay and water. A line of cow dung and red clay leading from the front of the house links the secret shrine of Laksmi when women smear their houses. This is to let the goddess Laksmi find her way to the worshipping place so that she may bestow wealth there. They brush nook and corner of their houses. They also garland doors of their houses and paint them with colour powders (Newar: sinham), specially, shops. Those who own a shop away from their own home must worship Laksmi at their shop first, then join their family to worship Laksmi at home.

In every house, Laksmi is kept in a secret worship place called agam. All the family members must join the worship. The eldest male member of the family (nayo) is in charge of the worship, while women are responsible to make ready puja plates and clean the houses. Worship ingredients are generally red and yellow powders, incenses, rice, popped rice, threads (jajamka), yoghurt, flowers, seasonal fruits, sweets and other foodstuffs. A painting of a Laksmi by a traditional painter is used to represent the goddess at the worship room. Old and new coins, money, gold, silver and all the treasures of the house are exhibited to receive worship on this occasion. At least one new coin must be offered to Laksmi or added to their stores. New utensils, new grains (paddy, rice, and wheat), measuring objects (mana, kule, and pathi) and weighing objects (dha) are also worshipped. To offer Laksmi with grains from the new harvest is an essential ritual on this occasion, because, they must offer her it first before they consume it themselves. They believe that Laksmi is the goddess of grains whose grace is necessary to gain good crops from their fields. The main reason of honouring Laksmi is to confer her grace to increase one's own wealth and prosperity. People worship her everyday, but they believe that this worship may bring them a great fortune for a whole year.

After the worship, family members eat a feast. Dried meat (sukula) of different animals, kept from the festival of Mohani is consumed today. Of course each foodstuff is first offered to the goddess Laksmi before the family eats itself. For three nights keeping her in the same place and worshipping her every day with great

respect assure Laksmi's presence. Then on the day after Kijapuja or on the fourth day's morning, Laksmi's blessing is carried out (svam kokayegu) from the secret place and distributed among the family members.

Gambling starts from the day of Laksmipuja for three days and three nights, which is legally forbidden during other times of the year. People believe that gambling is auspicious during Svanti, which might bring them a good fortune.

4. Mha puja (fourth day): worship of the self, start of the New Year

Mha puja is one of the oldest traditions of Nepal. This tradition is older than that of the Nepal era itself. Bhuvanlal Pradhan assumes that one of the Licchavi kings, most probably Manadeva I (464-505 AD) may have begun this festival during his reign. Paying all the debts of Nepalese, a generous wealthy trader called Samkhadhar Sakhvala began the Nepal era on 20 October, 879 AD during the reign of King Raghavadeva. As we stated above, the celebration of New Year's day and Mhapuja on the same day is a tradition more ancient than the Nepal era itself, but it happened that the Nepal era was introduced on this day. Malla rules in the Valley of Nepal used this era as the official era till their rule ended in 1769. In 1769 AD, after the Gorkha conquest of Nepal, the Shah rulers began to use Saka Samvat, and that was later replaced with Vikram Samvat by the Rana Prime minister Candra Shamser in 1903 AD. So far the use of Nepal Samvat never completely wiped out. Since the 1950s, Newar elite began to celebrate the New Year's day of the Nepal era as a public event in modern Nepal. Since it is called Nepal Samvat their demand is to recognise it as a national era. As the demand came from the Newars it began to be labelled as the Nevari Samvat by many non-Newar people. Recently, in 1999, Samkhadhar Sakhvala, the founder of Nepal era has been declared a national hero of Nepal. Newar people have taken this decision as a gesture of recognising Nepal Samvat as a national era.

Three calendar systems are in use in Nepal. They are, the solar based Vikram Era (Samvat) for the day to day business of His Majesty's Government (HMG); the Christian calendar by international organisations, HMG, business firms and individuals, and lunar based calendars to celebrate all the feast and festivals. The Royal Nepal Calendar Deciding Committee (Nepal Rajakiya Pamca_ga Nirnayaka Samiti), a body composed of astrologers, is authorised to publish Samvat calendars. They publish these calendars at the beginning of the solar month of Baisakha (March/April) to mark the New Year of the solar-based Vikram Era. Although the aim of the Royal Nepal Calendar Decision Committee is to serve the government by providing a solar based calendar, their calendars also include a detailed lunar calendar together with Christian dates as well. From the beginning of their publications they have been including Nepal era naming it "Nepaldesiya Samvat" or the "Era of the country Nepal." Their method of presenting a lunar calendar is based on the Indian astrological systems, so that there are no great differences between the Indian

and the Nepalese lunar calendar. In Nepal the lunar years begin either in the spring or fall. If begins in the spring, it is known as Caitradi and if in the fall is known as Kartikadi. The first one is also known as Purnmantaka month, ending on a full moon day while the latter one is Amantaka ending on the new moon. Purnamantaka month begins from Krisnapaksa or dark half while the Amantaka month begins from Suklapaksa or bright half.

On the New Year's day Mhapuja is celebrated in a great way. On this day, people must perform Mhapuja to all the deities located in their neighbourhood before they perform the worship of the self (Mhapuja) at their houses. Usually Mhapuja is performed at the top floor of a house in the evening. The floor is cleaned and smeared with cow dung and red clay. Then mandala, a cosmic circle of flour is drawn for everybody. Mandala are also drawn for those members of the family who are absent and for the guests who are present on the occasion. They also draw some mandala in the name of all the three hundred thirty million deities (tetasakoti dyo); Yama, his messenger (Yamadut) and Siva's messenger (Sivadut); and for household items, such as broom, winnow, grind stone, pestle, mortar, measuring pots (mana and pathi), water container (karuva), and earthen pitcher. Yama, his messenger, Ganesa, Laksmi, Kubera, Baliraja are made of steamed rice flour and displayed on the top of the row. In the centre of each mandala a small oil mandala is drawn. Then red powder, flowers, popped rice, husked rice are showered over the mandala. A small kind of rice pastry (Ivahacamari), walnuts, incenses, chestnuts, large wild lime, citrus medica common citron (tahsi), citrus fruit (bhvagatya) thread (jajamka), flower garland and long wicks (kheluita) are placed around a mandala to be handed over to the person sitting in front of the mandala. As far as possible, all the members of the family sit in a single row in front of each one's mandala facing east. Facing south is most undesirable because it is believe to be inauspicious. The eldest male member (nayo) of the house sits ahead of the row, then his juniors, unmarried daughters and other women are behind according to age seniority.

The nayo worships to a small lamp containing a figure of Ganesa (sukunda) before he begins other ritual activities. All other members of the family also throw a few grains of rice to Ganesa in a gesture of worship. Then the eldest woman (nakim) of the house puts a tika on everybody's forehead; she is assisted by other elder women to hand over the kheluita, jajamka and fruits to everybody. One must light owns kheluita and put on one's own mandala. This act can be seen as the actual moment of worshipping the self. The eldest woman pours (luigu) worship items like flower, husked rice, popped rice, peas, peanuts, and hazelnuts on the mandala of each person, then, she pours three times over the body of each person. This is to wish health, happiness and prosperity to the person worshipped. Then fruits, thread and flower garlands are handed over. Towards the end of the ceremony, worshipped persons are also handed over sagam, a ritual blessing which includes an egg, a fish, pieces of boiled meat and bread made of lentil (va) together with liquor to wish them a happy and

prosperous days ahead. Before the ritual ends a piece of tahsi and other fruits are eaten.

Walnuts, tahsi, kheluita and mandala are very important items of the day. Mandala represents the person worshipped, kheluita his life, tahsi his purity and walnut his strength. It is necessary to keep on lighting kheluita until the worship is finished. It is considered a bad sign if it extinguishes in between the ritual, because people link the light with a person's life span. The Mhapuja ceremony ends with the sweeping away of the decorated mandala from the bottom of the row to top and from the top to bottom. After sweeping away the mandala, the worship ceremony is ended, and a family feast then starts marking the actual end of the celebration of Mhapuja.

By celebrating Mhapuja people anticipate a successful and prosperous life in the coming year. This worship is also supposed to provide people with a good health and a long life. The way of celebrating this festival may vary from one family to another, but the essence of the celebration is not differently understood. Like in all other Newar festivals women play a major role in arranging the necessary items for the worship. They also take the responsibility of worshipping all the male members of the family. In case, if a person is living alone he must perform his Mhapuja himself, in such a case it can be considered a real worship of the self. Worship of the self is to recognise God in oneself. The celebration of Mhapuja indicates that one who recognises his capability may turn himself a god. To be a god means to be able to sacrifice yourself for the well being of others. According to Baldev Juju, the ultimate aim of a person is to achieve the stage of god.

During the Mhapuja, the charitable demon king Baliraj is also worshipped. A myth tells that he was pushed into netherworld (patala) by the god Visnu to prevent him from winning the heaven. By the power of his vow of giving gifts, Baliraj was about to win the heaven, this alarmed all the gods, so one day the disguised Visnu, arrived at Baliraj's door as a saint and begged some space for his three steps. Generous Baliraj happily granted the disguised Visnu a permission to step wherever he wanted. Visnu used this opportunity only to deceive Baliraj. Visnu covered whole of the heaven by his first step and the earth by his second step, so Baliraj had nothing left than his own head for Visnu's third step that enabled Visnu to push him down to the netherworld. However, after this disgraceful task Visnu asked Baliraj if he had any wishes. For this, Baliraja requested a permission to visit his kingdom to see his people once a year. Visnu granted him the day of Mhapuja as his day on the earth. This myth tells that the joyous celebration of Mhapuja is to assure the King Baliraj that his people are living happily in his country.

5. Kijapuja (fifth day): worship of brothers

This is the final day of the five-day's observance of the Yamapancaka or the Svanti festival. Today sisters worship their brothers to bless them health, happiness and prosperity. This festival is celebrated not only by the

Newars but also by the Parvates and others in Nepal. Among the Newars this day is known as the day of Kijapuja while the Parvates call it Bhaitika. For most Newars it is the occasion to worship both younger and elder brothers, but for many others it is the day to worship only their younger brothers. On this day, married sisters return to their parental homes to worship their brothers or brothers visit their sisters to receive worship from them. The reigning king also observes this festival by receiving tika from his sisters. Every year a royal astrologer announces the most auspicious time to receive tika from sisters, but apart from the king, people choose their own convenient time for the worship.

On the day of Kijapuja, Yama and Citragupta are worshipped together with brothers so mandala is drawn for them too. On the day of Mhapuja they are placed on the top of the row of worship, but on the day of Kijapuja they are placed at the bottom. Most ingredients used in Kijapuja are similar to Mhapuja, such as the drawing of mandala, oil mandala, flowers, rice, husked rice, popped rice, kheluita, incenses, walnut, varieties of fruits that includes tahsi. The way of worshipping brothers by their sisters is also similar to Mhapuja, but this time the actors are sisters. The most important items of the day are oil mandala, walnut, tahsi and gvaysvam (a small nut shaped flower).

Explaining slokas from Satkarma Ratnavali and traditional calendar (patro), Naghabhani confirms that the tradition of the worship of brothers by their sisters on this day is a tradition derived from the legendary worship of Yama by his younger sister Yamuna. He thinks it is wrong to call the day 'Kijapuja' or 'worship of younger brother' because the texts do not specify this aspect of brotherhood. He thinks it is appropriate to worship both younger and elder brothers. Yamuna is also identified with Yami. According to a Hindu myth, Yama and Yami are son and daughter of Vivasvat (the sun) and Saranyu and are twins. Yami tried to persuade Yama to marry her, but Yama refused the proposal of incest marriage, as he was afraid of being called evil man. Another myth tells that on this day a sister was preparing a worship of her brother, but Yama, the god of death arrived to take away her brother because his life span on the earth was ended. The clever sister persuaded Yama to wait and witness the worship. She worshipped Yama together with her brother, which charmed Yama. Thus, Yama awarded her a boon that saved her brother's life. This myth tells that she requested Yama not to take away her brother until the oil mandala dried up and gvaysvam faded away. People believe that a mandala made from oil never dries up; so gvaysvam never fades away, and Yama had to give up the idea of taking away her brother. It is believed that from that time onwards sisters began worshipping brothers on the same day to commemorate the mythical event believing that it will bestow a long life on their own brothers. This myth makes it clear that people assume a victory over death by worshipping Yama, the god of death, together with brothers. Hence this occasion can be taken as a celebration of the victory of life over death.

The day of Kijapuja is also to exchange gifts among brothers and sisters. Not only do sisters worship

their brothers and bless them for happiness and long life but they also feed them delicious foods, sweets, fruits, walnut, chestnut, betel nut, pistachio nuts, cashew nuts, almonds, raisins, cinnamon, chocolates and cloves (masala pva). In return brothers give money or clothe (sari) or both or other materials to their sisters.

The end of the worship of brothers is considered to be the end of the five-day long Svanti festival, but the real closure of the festival takes place on the following day of Kijapuja. On this day, early in the morning, the final worship of Laksmi is performed and the blessings of Laksmi are carried out from the agam to be distributed among the family members. The blessings include flower, tika, sweets, fruits and a feast. Married out daughters and sisters are also invited to receive the blessings and to attend the feast.

Significance of the festival

Pancaka is a Sanskrit name given to this festival, which mean 'consisting of five. To call this festival 'Pancaka' seems appropriate since this festival is celebrated for five consecutive days. 'Pancaka is generally considered inauspicious period, which may accord many times in a year. Auspicious tasks like seeding in the fields are avoided during such a period. It is considered most dangerous when somebody dies in a family during any of a day of a Pancaka. People believe that it can attract five lives from the same family when somebody dies during a Pancaka. When somebody dies in Pancaka adequate attention is given to avoid such a mischief. Adding eggs with the corpse to substitute lives is one of the crucial acts performed in such a case. As the god of death, Yama is accountable for determining death of all the creatures in the world. Therefore, Yama's predominance during the Pancaka festival is clear. In this regard the name 'Yamapancaka' or 'Five days dedicated to Yama' given to this festival is significant. People may regard Pancaka as a festival is good period, but the danger of death is not suspended. It is more so because of Yama's imminent presence during this festival. Yama's presence from the first day of the festival to the end is remarkable. To celebrate a festival in the presence of Yama, the god of death can be considered the most vulnerable one. Therefore people may have taken this opportunity as an occasion to appease Yama so that they receive his mercy. By worshipping Yama people anticipate his favour for a long life in the world and heaven after one's death. Hindu people believe as soon as one dies one's departed soul moves to Yama' court. There all souls are judged; either they are awarded heaven or they are sent to hell. Like all other religious communities in the world, death enchants Nepalese society very much. Remembering, worshipping and appeasing deceased ancestors (pitri) is a dominant feature of Newar ritual life. Every morning, sons must offer water and foods to their deceased ancestors. During all major and minor festivals the ancestors are presented foods (jugibvah), when there is any special family ceremony like marriage or other lifecycle rituals, they are involved. Sraddha is performed once a year to worship and feed them. In this respect, the worship of Yama, the god of death during the Svanti festival is not an

astounding act, but is another occasion to appease Yama who might otherwise cause untimely death or trouble after one's death. It is likely that people may have initiated the festival of Yamapancaka to overcome death.

However, as it is now, the main prominence of the festival is not Yama, but the worships of Laksmi, the worship of the self and the worship of brothers. Although people celebrate this festival for five days, they consider only these three days are most important days and celebrated with pomp. Scholars agree upon the fact that the Newar name 'Svanti' for this festival is derived from the words 'Svanhu Tithi' or 'Three-day festival.' On the third day of the festival worship of Laksmi, the goddess of wealth is celebrated with great fanfare. By worshipping Laksmi people are taught to live a balanced life with adequate wealth. It clearly shows that Newar society, although its social life is principally guided in a religious and spiritual manner, they also take into account that material prosperity and happiness in their life is essential.

The worship of Laksmi and the worship of brothers are no less important days of this festival, but the Newars take Mhapuja or the worship of the self as the most important event of the festival. Mhapuja is prevalent only among the Newars. In many respects Mhapuja can be considered a unique Nepalese traditions. Worship of the self or worship of one's body (mha) and soul (atma) is Mhapuja. For religious minded people, body and soul are two different phenomena. They believe that their body is temporal one while their soul is an immortal. They believe that in a person a god is residing. Hence a person is part of a god or goddess, so the worship of the self is an occasion to respect or recognise the god in oneself. Nepalese tradition of worshipping gods and goddesses is to invoke their power (sakti). Hence, the worship of the self is to understand one's capability and to utilise it for the betterment of human beings and the whole universe, in order to enable oneself to attend the level of a god or goddess.

The last day's worship of brothers is another important day of this festival. This tradition is one of the most popular customs in the region of South Asia. It is not only religiously meaningful but also from a social point of view it is significant, because it plays a great role in strengthening the relation between brothers and sisters. A balanced relation between brothers and sisters is one of the essential aspects of Nepalese social life. Especially the relation between out married sisters and brothers is crucial. If not handled thoughtfully the bond may turn very unpleasant. In such a situation they lose dignity in their society. The day of Kijapuja provides brothers and sisters an opportunity to up keep their relationship.

Of course one of the most important aspects of this festival is the change of the lunar year. The five day's celebrations of Svanti festival ends after the Kijapuja but it gives a way to renew the whole cycle of rituals for one full year. It is clear from our earlier discussions that the celebrating the turn of the year on this day is an ancient tradition in Nepal. Therefore, I found it appropriate to call this occasion the turn of the ritual year in Nepal, because except two festivals: Ghyocakusalhu and Bisketjatra all

the feasts and festivals in the Nepal are celebrated according to lunar calendar. In India too, those who follow the Kartikadi lunar calendar take this occasion as the turn of the ritual year and celebrate their New Year's day. As Tyauhar or Divali, this is a widely celebrated festival among the Hindus in India and other countries. It can be well assumed that the tradition of the celebration of the New Year might have in a long run created the wonderful festival of Svanti or Yamapancaaka. Although the Nepal Samvat was later invented than the tradition of the celebration of the New Year and Mhapuja, it has made a history in itself by its continuation of 1120 years. This is thanks to Samkhadhara Sakhvala, who, unlike others in the world who preferred their own names, took the name of his country for the Era he established. It will be erroneous to call the Nepal era a Newar or Newari Samvat. There is no reason that only the Newars feel proud of the Nepal era because the name 'Nepal' implies that it belongs to all Nepalese. Last year His Majesty's Government of Nepal declared Samkhadhara Sakhvala, the founder of the Nepal era, a national hero.

Conclusion

This festival contains five major components: the worship of bird and animals like crow, dog and cow, the invocation of Yama by worshipping his messengers and himself, the worship of Laksmi or wealth, worship of the self on the New Year's day and worship of brothers. The necessity of the combination of these five different ritual activities in one single festival is difficult to be explained. The most prevalent feature of this festival is the presence of Yama or death. Since this festival is also called 'Yamapancaaka' it is logical. However, if we consider this is only the festival of Yama, then the worship of Laksmi, the self and brothers cannot logically be fitted in. Crow, dog and cow are one or other way related to Yama and his realm, therefore their worship during this festival make a sense, but Yama's worship together with the self and brothers is difficult to be comprehended. The relation between two ritual sequels: worship of the self and worship of brothers is not clear to me either. Although the natures of worshipping in these two days are similar the actors are different who carry out the rituals; so on the values and meanings of each day's rituals are different too. Why the worship of the self and brothers are observed after the worship of Laksmi is not understandable either. For that matter no distinct reasons are there to be explained the relation of each day's ritual with another and the reasons of their sequence.

Yama is invoked throughout the festival but his absence at the time of Laksmi's worship is a puzzle. Whether it is an intended one or he is forgotten or ignored in the presence of wealth is unknown. The reason may be that people prefer forgetting death when they are engaged at worshipping wealth or busy with material life. Perhaps it is to tell that the wealth makes people blind and even it let people forget inevitable truth like death. May be this is an occasion to demarcate a line between material life and spiritual life. However, when we look at the worship of cow in the same morning, an

animal related to realm of Yama, as the goddess of wealth, then hardly we can see the real separation of wealth from the death. Perhaps it is to give a message to let people realise the danger of engagement in material life, which make them so busy that they become unaware of obvious truths like death.

Since people are busy honouring Yama from the first day of the festival to its end this festival can more appropriately be called the celebration of Yama or death. In this regard the name 'Yamapancaaka' is most suitable name for this festival. Yama as the god of death is considered to be a less compassionate divinity. For people his worship is much out of fear than to honour his divinity. People know that death is inevitable in one's own life but they like to avoid it as far as possible. Perhaps this festival is celebrated to let people realise the limitation of one's life hence gives them an opportunity to learn about the truth of death or the essence of life. It is clear that the real motive behind the invocation of Yama as the protective god at the time of the New Year's celebration or worship of the self is to plead his grace for the continuation of life for another year without being obstructed by him. Similarly, his worship together with brothers is also thought to receive his blessings for health and life of brothers. These two events can be considered the celebration of life, albeit with the mercy of Yama, the death. By worshipping him, people endeavour to subjugate the power of death. It is more significant that Mhapuja is performed as the first ritual of the New Year and people anticipate health, long life, happiness and prosperity in the New Year. Yama's worship at such an occasion to pray for his protection is meaningful, because he is the god who possesses the power of determining people's life span in the world and their fate after death. Yama's acceptance of being worshipped as a protective god in this festival by people can be taken as his willingness of showing his compassion. Compassion towards human beings of the god of death can be more accurately called the defeat of the death of god. In this regard the celebration of worship of the self and worship of brothers both can be considered the celebration of overcoming of death. Hence we can affirm the festival of Svanti as the celebration of victory over death.

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caste organization to ensure that their offspring will officially be a part of a caste group.

In sum, this study shows that despite the fact that caste is no longer recognized in the Nepalese constitution, caste is still the main vector of Newar identity, and this is seen most clearly through the analysis of Newar marriage and kinship.

ABSTRACT OF PH. D. THESIS

**Newar Marriage and Kinship in
Kathmandu, Nepal**

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This thesis presents a descriptive and analytical study of Newar marriage and kinship in Kathmandu. Essentially, this is a study about caste and the role that it plays in Newar life, in particular, the way that caste is expressed through marriage patterns and kinship rituals. This study also shows that although the link between one's caste and one's traditional caste occupation is breaking down, one's caste identity is still maintained through one's choice of marriage partner and one's participation in kinship rituals which occur at the various levels of caste organization.

Newar caste organizations are also undergoing a process of transformation. In addition to the traditional caste organizations, there are also new intercaste organizations which cater to the ritual needs of those in intercaste marriages. This recent phenomenon coincides with the professionalization of other caste organizations, which, in addition to performing their ritual duties, have also taken on the role of social and economic guardians to their caste members. It could be argued that although some forms of caste are no longer applicable, in other ways, caste in Newar society has never been stronger or more important. Despite the claim that intercaste marriages are on the rise, the data shows that the majority of Newars still practice caste endogamy. Membership into a caste organization - which is through the initiation ritual - is so important to Newar identity that some intercaste couples have started their own