

Chapter 5: Life Cycle Rituals

Rites de Passage

Arnold van Gennep (1960[1909]) was the first to separate *rites de passage* as a special category of rituals, “ceremonies whose essential purpose is to enable the individual to pass from one defined position to another which is equally well defined” (Gennep 1960:2). These rites are normally connected to changes, transitions and occasions as birth, initiation, marriage and death. van Gennep subdivided these rituals into rites of separation (preliminal rites), rites of transition (liminal rites) and rites of incorporation (postliminal rites). Although a *rite of passage* theoretically includes all these three stages, sometimes the phases are neither equally elaborated nor equally important (ibid:11).

Victor Turner developed further this conceptual framework (Turner 1991[1967], 1995[1969]). Although *rites de passage* are found in all societies, in relatively stable and cyclical societies the changes are dependent on the biological rhythms (Turner 1991:93). What is unclear in a society is unclear. Transitional persons are thought to be particularly polluting since they are in a liminal phase. Transition is dangerous, and it is controlled by the ritual ideas concerning pollution and purification (Douglas 1994[1966]:97).

There are differences between static and dynamic pollution situations. The static pollution notion concerns states which are ambiguously defined, while the dynamic pollution notion derives from ritualised transitions between states (Turner 1991:97). The pollution beliefs are related to the culture’s moral values, they reinforce the cultural and social structure but also reduce the ambiguity in the moral sphere. Thus are the *rites de passage* not purificatory but prophylactic. They do not redefine or restore a lost former status or purify from the effect of contamination, but they define entrance to a new status (Douglas 1993[1975]:54-56).

Bourdieu, on the contrary, prefers the term *rites d’ institution* rather than *rites de passage*. He emphasizes the distinctions between the stages rather than the documentation of the rituals. The importance is the establishment of new social roles and their function in the society. The crucial point is the difference and the separation between those who have undergone the rituals from those who have not, because it creates a hierarchy of legitimate distinctions and social practices (Bourdieu 1996:27-28). I will combine both these two approaches, because it is the person’s achieved status in his lifetime which is manifested in the mortuary remains. Thus I have emphasized the individual’s achieved status through the life cycle rituals. These status differences are expressed in the funeral rituals and thereby in the archaeological material.

Hinduism

Though the Hindu law books and the religious texts prescribe how the rituals are to be performed, they cannot be used as a dogma. Hinduism includes diversity. The religion has never insisted on the necessity of one supreme figure in religious matters and has never agreed on certain articles of beliefs as essential for all Hindus (Kinsley 1993[1982]:6). Therefore, there are variations in the performance of the rituals, even among the Brahmins, and to a greater extent among the Magars. The Magars have more or less the same life cycle rituals as the Brahmins, but to some degree with a different content. I will nevertheless try to generate some general patterns within a Hindu framework concerning the relationship between life cycle rituals and burial customs. A fruitful approach to this ritual plurality might be Bourdieu’s analysis of the practice of rites (Bourdieu 1995a:18):

“Rites are practices that are ends in themselves, that are justified by their very performance; things that one does because they are “the done thing”, “the right thing to do”, but also because one cannot do otherwise, without needing to know why or for whom one does them, or what they mean, such as act of funeral piety. This is what the work of interpretation, which seeks to restore their meaning, to grasp their logic, makes one forget: they may have, strictly speaking, neither meaning nor function, other than the function implied in their very existence, and the meaning objectively inscribed in the logic of actions or words that are done or said in order to “do or say something” (where there are “nothing else to be done”), or more precisely in the generative structures of which these words or actions are the product, or even in the oriented space within they are performed”.

From this point of view it is not to anticipate that the social reality will totally tally with a reciprocally, coherent holistic model, although in certain respects it will. Nevertheless, the same patterns appear among the Magars as the Brahmins, although the Magars give them another content. A practical understanding of a general equivalence of a relation between life cycle rituals and burial customs, may justify using Brahmanism as a Hindu framework for life cycle rituals. In this regard, I will use the Brahmins as the point of departure, and start with some brief remarks on Hinduism.

In the Hindu Triad of Gods Brahman is the Creator, Vishnu the Preserver and Shiva the Destroyer. However, Shiva is also the Recreator, worshipped as the god of reproduction, symbolized with a *lingam*, a phallus. The religious concepts of purity and pollution are fundamental in Hinduism. One central conceptual opposition is *samsara* and *mukti*, the phenomenal world and release or salvation respectively. *Samsara* is “the round of birth and death”, and it works according to *karma*, the law of moral cause

and effect, whereby people's actions are repaid through their own suffering. The final goal is *mukti*, release, salvation from *samsara* into transcendent reality (Bennett 1983:36-37). It indicates the rhythms of the cosmos because these rhythms are revelations and manifestations of the fundamental sacred powers behind the cosmos (Eliade 1993[1958]:388). Ascetic values penetrate the religion as rules of purity and pollution. Especially the organic processes; eating, urination, defecation, copulation, menstruation, birth and death, are all perceived as polluting. Through rituals the individuals try to stay pure, which is necessary for release (Bennett 1983:40-41).

There are a lot of symbolic purifying activities. Especially the ascetic actions of fasting, sexual abstinence, vows of silence and giving of ritual gifts, give merit and purification. Since almost everything is ranked in a conceptual hierarchy of purity and pollution, some elements have active purifying powers, e.g. fire, water, gold and the five products of the cow (milk, curd, clarified butter, dung and urine) (ibid:43).

In the classical Western philosophy everything consists of four elements (Lund, Pihl and Sløk 1992[1962]:70). In the Hindu philosophy there is five elements, i.e. sky (in Bhagavad-Gita the term "ether" is used, and "space" is also used (Ramanujan 1973:173)), air, light, water and earth. In each of the five elements dwells a god. *Shiva* dwells in the sky (or ether), *Visnu* in the air, *Agni* in the light, *Varuna* in the water and *Brahma* in the earth. *Agni* is the God of Fire, and appears in three phases - in heaven as the sun, in mid-air as the lightning, on Earth as ordinary fire. He is considered as the mediator between men and gods and the protector of men and their homes (Dowson 1995[1982]:6). *Varuna* personifies the God of Water. It is "one of the oldest of the *Vedic* deities, a personification of the all-investing sky, the maker and upholder of heaven and earth. As such he is the king of the universe, king of gods and men, possessor of illimitable knowledge, the supreme deity" (ibid:336). However, in later times he has become the god of the seas and the rivers (ibid.). In this form he destroys all the demons of the underwater world (Chatterjee 1996:21). When a person dies, each of the five elements goes back to its origin, whether the body is burned or buried, but it happens in a different order. "On account of difference being shown in deep sleep and death (between the individual soul and the Brahman)" (Brahma-Sutras 1.3.43). This is the doctrine that the body corresponds to and even is identical with the universe. The body as a being is a microcosm and thus encompasses the world, the macrocosm and the gods in particular ways (Goudriaan 1979:57-58).

Even though I said that the Hindu scriptures cannot be used as a dogma, I will use and refer to some of the Sanskrit texts as explanations of the life cycle rituals and the obsequies. In Hinduism, the manual of the life cycle rituals is known as the *Grihya Sutras*, the rules of Vedic domestic ceremonies. In Hinduism there are no books like *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, a book of liberation through an understanding of the in between. "The in between" refers to the whole process between death and rebirth, and thus the book is also "The Tibetan Book of Birth" (Thurman 1994).

The *Garuda Puranas*, however, are used by the Brahman priests during the funeral ceremonies, and the performance and the meaning of the death rites are described complementary.

Regarding the meaning of objects and rituals, if my informants knew anything about this, they often referred to the holy scriptures (even if they could not read the texts themselves) or they read and quoted from the Sanskrit texts because they wanted to tell me the "truth" and the story "as it is". There have been some changes and local adaptations both regarding meaning and content, still, many of the ideas prevail. Even the best informants might not know the meaning of the texts he presents although he could be an excellent performer. The meaning may be hidden from the informant because it is buried in a tradition, and to unravel a hidden meaning involves an archaeological thrust: an investigation into the past (Obeyesekere 1990:221-222).

Thus, in my opinion, it is possible to use the holy texts as a source as long as they are used in the rituals and cohere with the information I have got, either by the informants or by observations. However, it gives rise to another problem that I will discuss in chapter 7; to what extent are the ideas of Brahmanism representative of the common people?

The Hindu Life Cycle Rituals

"As the embodied soul continuously passes, in this body, from boyhood to youth to old age, the soul similarly passes into another body at death. A sober person is not bewildered by such a chance" (Bhagavad-Gita 2.13). Hinduism makes a distinction between domestic rituals and public rituals. The domestic rituals are rituals performed at the occasion of birth, initiation, marriage, and the propitiation of ancestors (Das 1977:8). These rituals are a part of the life cycle rituals in Hinduism. The Brahmins (or the Hindus in general) have five main or orthodox life cycle rituals (*samskaras*):

(1) Birth. I will include the pre-natal *samskaras* in this category. The pre-natal rituals consist of (1) the conception rite by the performance of which a woman receives semen scattered by her husband, and (2) the quickening a male child rite by which male child is produced (Pandey 1969:48-69). Among the birth ceremonies is *nwaran*, the name-giving ceremony, the most important, because "name is the primary means of social intercourse, it brings about merit and it is the root of fortune. From name man attains fame. Therefore, the naming ceremony is very praiseworthy" (ibid:78). The name-giving ceremony is performed on the eleventh day, after the mother has completed her birth pollution. The family's priest, a *pandit*, will give the baby a name according to the astrological calendar whereas the child's father gives his *thar* (clan or surname) and *gotra* (clan as an exogamous agnatic unit) to the child and thereby accepts it into the family's caste and patriline. With this ceremony, where the child is a member of its father's patriline, the child's entry into the rebirth has begun (Bennett 1983:55-56). The Magars, however, may

have less days of birth pollution, and not all use Brahman priests in the ceremony.

(2) **Pasne**, the first rice ceremony. The rice feeding ceremony is the rite where the child receives its first rice meal. This is also the first meal of solid food. By this ceremony the child has entered the world of rice, and as the cooked rice is extremely vulnerable for transmission of pollution, the child has thus entered the sphere of purity and pollution. The ritual is performed at the age of five months for girls and six months for boys, at an auspicious day and hour appointed by a priest or an astrologer. According to Lynn Bennett, females are usually connected with odd numbers and males with even numbers in Hindu symbolism (ibid:120), however, my impression is the opposite, namely that males are connected with odd numbers (see chapter 6). Anyhow, men are usually superior to women and boys are superior to girls. This dominance is expressed in the two next life cycle rituals, and also in the *Grihya-Sutras*. Why girls undergo *pasne* before boys is uncertain, and the Sanskrit texts give no explanations. Among some of the Magars, they also use meat as a part of the meal. According to the *Grihya-Sutra* which prescribes the rite, different food items are connected with different qualities in life. The boy should be fed with “goat’s flesh if he is desirous of nourishment, flesh of partridge if desirous of holy lustre, fish if desirous of swiftness, boiled rice with *ghee* if desirous of splendour - (such) food prepared with milk curds, honey, and *ghee*, he should give (to the child) to eat” and “let the mother eat the remnant” (Sankhayana-Grihya-Sutra, I Adhyana, 27 Khanda, 2-11). The boy shall receive the food with the *Mantra* (holy verse): “Lord of food, give us food painless and strong; bring forward the giver; bestow power on us, on men and animals” (ibid), whereas with the rite only (without the *Mantra*) for a girl (Asvalayana-Grihya-Sutra, I Adhyaya, 16 Khandika, 5-6).

(3) **Bartamande**, the ceremony of initiation into caste and patriline. The *bartamande* ritual is only for boys, and consists of several parts. The two most important rites are the *chewar* rite (the hair cutting ceremony) and the *upanayana* rite (the investiture with the sacred thread). The *chewar* rite is done by all *varna* or *jat* groups, whereas the *upanayana* rite is only for the Brahmans and Chhetris. The specific meaning of the tonsure ceremony is interpreted in different ways, as a procedure for getting release from sin (Parry 1994:26), as castration anxiety through shaving, the act being a symbolic form of castration (Obeyesekere 1990:43) or as a metaphor not only for purification, but also death, because the child must die before the adult can be born (Leach 1976:79). Moreover, a tonsure ceremony is also performed as the entrance to the sons’ death pollution in the mourning period.

Brahmans and Chhetris are in Nepal the *tagadhari jats*, which means that they are twice born because they are wearing the *janai*, the sacred thread. In the Sanskrit texts the *Vaishya jat* is also considered as a twice-born *jat*, “the three first castes are all called *Dvijas* (twice born) because after the first birth from mother they are born again with the sacred girdle girding round their body” (Garuda Purana I, I.94.24). “The sacred thread investiture of Brahman shall be performed in the eight year from conception or nativity,

that of a Ksatriya in the eleventh year and that of a Vaishya in the twelfth year or according to some, as is the convention in the family” (Garuda Purana I, I.94.1, Gobhila-Grihya-Sutra, II Prapathaka, 10 Kandika, 1-4). “Until the sixteenth year the time has not passed for a Brahmana, until the twenty-second for a Kshatriya, until the twenty-fourth for a Vaishya. After that time (has passed), they become *patitasavitrika* (i.e. they have lost their right of being taught the *Savitri* (the holy verses of the Vedas)). Let them not initiate such men, nor teach them, nor perform sacrifices for them, nor form matrimonial alliances with them” (Gobhila-Grihya-Sutra, II Prapathaka, 10 Kandika, 5-6).

Albeit there are some differences in the relation to the holy scriptures, the meaning of the content is still the same. The first three of these rites are directed towards the child’s achieving full responsibilities of action and ritual purity, *karma caleko*, to get “activated karma”, bringing the child into *samsara* (Bennett 1983:53). In the word of John N. Gray (1995), “the second birth is a religious event occurring when a boy reaches a level of maturity that enables him to “understand the Vedas” - around the age of eight for Brahmans and twelve for Chhetris. Because he is able to appreciate the sacred texts, the boy’s actions become morally significant in that they affect his future re-birth (*karma*)” (Gray 1995:32). After this ceremony the initiated has to behave according to the caste rules and prescriptions. The importance of receiving the sacred thread is to become an adult capable of understanding the Vedas and hence “marry as befits the Householder. Being a Householder, a man who consummates his social life by having children who will mourn his death and continue his lineage as well as fulfilling his responsibilities to the gods through the sponsorship and/or performance of sacrifice” (ibid:34). This has to be seen in the realm of *dharma*, the moral action and religious duty, the duty of the Householder.

The Magars (or the *Matwalis*) in Nepal are not twice-born, and in that manner they only perform the *chewar* ceremony. I will henceforth distinguish between *bartamande* (Brahmans/ twice-born) and *chewar* (Magars/*Matwalis*). The Brahmans perform the ritual as they traditionally have done, when the boy is between the age of eight and twelve years. The age of which the *chewar* is performed has been going down, and the Magars normally perform it at the age of three, five or seven years.

Gupha basne, the female initiation rite when the girl gets her first menstruation. It marks the transition of a girl from presexual to a sexual being. *Gupha basne* means “staying in the cave”, and the most important feature is the seclusion of the girl in a dark room (Bennett 1983:235-236). However, it is not considered as one of the orthodox life-cycle rituals (*samskara*). Though this ritual is of special importance regarding purity and pollution, it does not affect the girl’s *karma* in a way corresponding to the way the *bartamande* affects a boy. The women become *karma caleko* only after the marriage ceremony, whether it is before or after the *gupha basne* (ibid:59). The women’s inferiority is expressed in the fact that they are dependent upon a husband to become *karma caleko*. The *gupha*

basne ritual is mainly performed by the Brahmans and the Chhetris. The Magars are to a less extent concerned with menstrual pollution, and they traditionally do not observe this ceremony. However, in one of my research villages, the Magars have recently started performing this ritual (see chapter 6). Nancy C. Luktehaus argues that “the utility of looking at female initiation rites not only in relationship to male initiation, but, more importantly, as part of a larger corpus of rituals that celebrate not only the life cycle of a woman but the life cycle of the public groups or larger community in which they are embedded” (Luktehaus 1995:28). In this context the marriage is the most important rite.

(4) Marriage “marks the beginning of the productive and socially responsible householder stage for which, in the case of males, the *bartamande* is a necessary preparation. As such, marriage is a major expression of the value of fertility and conventional religion in the Hindu conflict between ideals of the householder and those of the ascetic” (Bennett 1983:71). It is the most prestigious family ceremony and the main occasion which the greatest number of members of the caste and other persons gather together (Dumont 1970:110).

In marriage the decent and affinity is transferred as well as the subsistence production, that is the access to land and thus the relations of production and consumption. Therefore the marriage is an important happening in the village as it establishes new relations. It “brings” the woman into the man’s household, “the household appears as a patrilineal core of men with women attached to it by marriage who enable these men to morally satisfy their passion and to realize their *dharma* through their wife’s reproductive fertility” (Gray 1995:50). The various duties of the householder are among other scriptures also referred to by the *Garuda Puranas*, “after giving fees to the preceptor and taking the ritualistic bath with his permission and concluding his student age he shall marry a girl endowed with good characteristics. She shall be a virgin. (...)” (Garuda Purana I, I.95.1-3).

If the girl is married before the menarche, she acquires the caste of her husband automatically, and if she marries afterwards the children become “half-breeds” (Parry 1994:111). The maiden’s father will be duly rewarded in heaven by giving her away in marriage for the continuance of his ancestral line (Prasad 1993:76). The women’s inferiority in Hinduism has its counterpart in Buddhism where a female rebirth is to some extent seen as less favourable, because the woman undergoes certain sufferings the men are free from; she has to leave her parents’ family, menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth and she has to wait upon a man (Harvey 1990:215). Though being born as a human is precious and a rare and valuable occasion, *samsara* as a hole is characterized by suffering and the aim is liberation from it (Samuel 1993:200). But salvation is only possible to those who are living in *samsara*, i.e. only human beings who are subject to rebirth may attain liberation (Long 1977:78).

Nowadays the normal marriage age is either around the end of the teens or the early of the twenties. In the past,

however, the Brahman bride should be married before her first menstruation. If the bride was married after the menarche, the bride’s parents should donate a cow’s calf to the bridegroom’s parents as a compensation for her loss of purity. Since the bride should be married before her first menstruation, she would have achieved the state of *karma caleko* before *gupha basne*, and therefore the latter rite would be without importance for her *karma*. Although the marriage age has increased and marriage nowadays happens after the *gupha basne*, it does not affect the state when she becomes morally responsible for her own actions. The women’s inferiority in relation to men is expressed in the fact that they are dependent upon a husband to become *karma caleko* whereas the men achieve this status by themselves, and that all aspects connected to their biological, reproductive role are connected with impurity. Thus there are more taboos and restrictions for women than men.

(5) Death ceremonies. The death ceremonies are in a way never ending. There are two classes of deceased ancestors, firstly the father, grandfather and great grandfather of any particularly person, and secondly the progenitors of mankind in general. In honour of both these groups of ancestors *sraddhas* rites are performed. *Sraddha* constitutes “a debt to the dead” that ought to be repaid assuming the dead ones being alive and living with us. It is believed that one owes three main debts. First is the debt to the gods, next the debt to the guru, and finally the debt to the forefathers. *Sraddha* seems to be the outcome of the *karma* theory and establishes bridges between the living and the dead (Pathak 1997). There are four levels of ritual obligation:

a) *Kiriya basne*, “sitting in mourning”. The main rites are (1) disposing of the corpse, (2) feeding the *preta* (a ghost or a malevolent spirit) and reconstituting its “body”, (3) changing the *preta* into a *pitri* (forefather), and (4) purifying the family and the chief mourner (Bennett 1983:98). The mourning period is for the Brahmans normally thirteen days, whereas there are great local variations among the Magars, from three to thirteen days. My main research objective is this *kiriya basne* part of the death ceremonies in relation to the deceased’s life cycle rituals. In archaeological terms, participation in the various life cycle rituals determines whether the deceased is buried or cremated and the presence or absence of grave goods, i.e. the main archaeological remains after the death ceremonies.

The next three levels of mourning obligations have not been a primary object of research. The three levels are b) the year of mourning and its monthly rites, c) the annual commemoration and d) the collective celebration in which food offerings are made to many ancestors at once (Bennett 1983:107-120). In these three *sraddha* rites the offering of *pindas* (rice balls) are essential, as the gifts are meant to enable the dead to be ferried from the world of karmic miseries to the abode of the blessed (Prasad 1995:xi).

The mode of the annual *sraddha* is prescribed in the *Garuda Puranas* and thus provides information about the purpose and the procedure of the performances (Garuda

Purana I, I.99.1-45). The performance of *sraddha* removes sin and releases the soul from ghosthood, and has to be seen in the realm of the eternal soul. “For the soul there is neither birth nor death at any time. He has not come into being, does not come into being, and will not come into being. He is unborn, eternal, ever-existing and primeval. He is not slain when the body is slain” (Bg. 2.20), because we “are permanent, (we) want permanent residence. We do not wish to die because in actuality we are permanent. Nor do we want to grow old or be deceased because these are all external or nonpermanent states. (...) If somehow we can get out of the material body, we can escape the miseries that are integral with it” (Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada 1980:27).

The son is absolved from his debt to his parents by performing obsequies. Thus he commits a double sin if he omits or fails in the performance of these rituals, the ancestors will suffer and he himself will reap the fruits of his actions in the next life, where he probably will meet his ancestors. It is his duty as a man and as a Householder in the realm of *dharmā*. Moreover, “whatever gifts are made by one during the life time, become beneficial later” (Garuda Purana II, II.13.19) because “whatever gifts a man has given himself they stand in his favour (at the hour of death)” (ibid:II.4.16). They are gifts made to men in the sight of the gods, “a generosity towards them”, in the terms of Marcell Mauss, because those gods who give and return gifts are there to give a considerable thing in the place of a small one (Mauss 1993[1925]:14-17).

The importance of having a son to perform the death rituals is expressed explicitly in the *Garuda Puranas*: “There is no salvation for a man without a son. He can never attain heaven without a son” (Garuda Purana II, II.13.18 & III, II.29.4). “A man is released from his debt to the manes on seeing his son’s face. A man is released from three types of debts (to the sages, gods and manes) on seeing his grandson. On seeing his son, grandson, and great grandson he attains eternal or celestial worlds” (Garuda Purana III, II.25.33-34). “Even a man having sons, dying without the performance of these rites, does not attain salvation. A man without son by doing these rites beforehand shall have a happy journey on the Great Highway” (Garuda Purana II, II.14.14). The funeral of an old man is often described as “the second wedding”, and the funeral procession as a marriage party which accompanies the groom to the house of the bride (Parry 1994:157).

This illuminates the fact that death is not separated from, but rather integrated in the social structure and the society. Therefore is marriage as a social institution fundamental in the understanding of death, the necessity of having a son and the traditional valuation of women in the Brahman society. In the household, men are associated with the whole household and the goal of the moral actions in the world, while women are means and thereby subordinate to men (Gray 1995:49).

Thus widow burning (*suttee* or *sati*) was practiced in the past, “a woman who enters the fire after her husband prospers in heaven like *Arundhati* (the epitome of the chaste and faithful wife, a model of conjugal excellence).

Until and unless the woman burns herself after her husband’s death she is never released from the bond of her sex” (Garuda Purana II, II.4.95-96). “Rise up, woman, into the world of the living. Come here; you are lying beside a man whose life’s breath has gone. You were the wife of this man who took your hand and desired to have you” (Rig Veda 10.18.8). The wife of the dead man should lie with the face down beside him, probably miming copulation (O’Flaherty 1994[1981]:53-54). Widow burning was prohibited in Nepal with the *Mulukin Ain* (Civil Code).

However, even after the first *Mulukin Ain* of 1854 a slave wife married to a freeman was allowed to practice widow burning (Hofer 1979:126). The practice of *sati* has to be seen in the light of widow remarriage which the *Mulukin Ain* of 1854 does not prohibit (ibid:169).

The Deceased’s Life Cycle Rituals

The crucial features of the burial custom in relation to life cycle rituals depends upon *karma* and the person’s achieved social position in the society. To what degree the deceased has entered *samsara*, “the round of birth and death”, depends upon *karma caleko*, the extent to which the *karma* is “activated”. The level of entrance into this world, determines the accurate entrance to the next, i.e. when a person dies. The individual’s social status in the society is expressed in the funeral rites and has three physical manifestations in the mortuary remains: (1) The presence or absence of grave goods. (2) The treatment of the corpse, i.e. whether it is cremated or buried. (3) The widow’s jewellery in her husband’s funeral.

(1) The presence or absence of grave goods. The overwhelmingly dominant and important grave goods, and normally the only one, is food. Raw rice is the major determinant regarding the presence or absence of grave goods. Deceased without *pasne*, the rice feeding ceremony, cannot receive raw rice or any other grave goods as a grave gift. If the person is introduced to the world of rice, then raw rice is always the fundamental part of the grave goods, often combined with lentils used in the daily meal. Participation in the *pasne* ritual determines whether the deceased will receive grave goods or not. The raw rice is a symbol of fertility. The seed will germinate and give life to others. Nepal is the land of rice. The God Lord *Gorakhnath* promised the Nepalese people that their country was made of rice, as well as that in this country they should never starve or suffer of hunger. Therefore the Nepalese are never beggars, but they work hard and pray for rice and fertility, for the seed which will sprout, become many and give new life. *Gorakhnath* was a medieval master Yogi of northern and western India, a famous saint and worker of miracles. He is considered a representative or even an embodiment of Shiva (Briggs 1973[1938]:179-181). Thus raw rice is a symbol of the forthcoming life, the rebirth. The daal or the lentils help the soul to receive this freedom or salvation. If other food items are used as gifts to the deceased, they contribute to the fulfilment of this aim. Whether the food is put into containers or not, is a practical solution which depends upon tradition.

(2) The treatment of the corpse. The *karma caleko* state of the soul demands cremation as the burial custom, if the funeral rites are to be performed accurately. On the contrary, if the soul of the deceased has not become *karma caleko*, then the corpse is buried. In other words, men with *bartamande* and married women are cremated, while unmarried girls and boys without *bartamande*, are buried. Differences in grave and cremation constructions as physical monuments and structures, are of minor importance, because the funeral practices belong to either cremation as a category or burial as a category.

(3) The widow's jewellery in her husband's funeral. When the Householder dies, the widow changes her status in the society as well as in the household. She becomes partly stigmatised, she is neither socially allowed to marry again nor does any man want to marry her. Still she has to carry out some of her husband's duties as a Householder, and thus she gets other responsibilities and obligations in the family. Because she leaves one position in the society and enters a new social role, the widow has to mark this transition. She has to dispose of all things her husband was responsible for and obliged to give her. In the house she will take off her jewellery and break the bracelets and place them on the deceased husband's chest. Thereafter he is carried to the cemetery, and either cremated or buried with his wife's jewellery on his chest (Figure 5.1). The widow will also change her clothes and take off the *tika* (a mark of blessing placed on the forehead). The widow is in a sense morally responsible for her husband's death and must expiate the misfortune she has brought to him for the rest of her life. She has become a "half corpse" (Parry 1994:174). This has to be seen in the light of festivals observed only by women who are married or of marriageable age. Especially the Teej festival reveals all the hidden wishes of a Hindu housewife. They fast for a productive marriage, good fortune and a long life for their husband (Anderson 1988:116ff, Jha 1996:89ff, Kaushik n. d.).

Nowadays the widow's gold and silver jewellery have become heirlooms within the family, but silver jewellery can still be found as grave gifts (Figure 5.2). However, the broken personal decoration consists of bracelets and jewellery made of plastic (Figure 5.3). This ritual happens in the household for two reasons, the change of status is connected to the domestic sphere and the Brahman women are not allowed to participate in the funeral ceremony at the graveyard. The Magar women are allowed to attend the funerals, but local practices and traditions decide whether they participate or not. When unmarried girls and women

die, the jewellery and bracelets are broken and placed on her chest in the cemetery.

General Remarks on Life Cycle Rituals and Burial Customs

Except from the *nwaran*, the name giving ceremony, is it possible to trace all the orthodox life cycle rituals (*samskara*) in the mortuary remains: (1) The presence or absence of grave goods for both men and women depends upon *pasne*, the rice feeding ceremony. (2) The treatment of the corpses of men depends upon *bartamande*. (3) The marriage determines the treatment of the corpses of women. It is also possible to trace the marriage ceremony in the man's funeral. It is extremely rare that older people in villages live unmarried. Thus is it possible to decide whether the deceased man's wife was alive or not when he died. If the husband has got jewellery as grave goods, then his wife has become a widow, on the contrary, if not, it is most likely that his wife had already died. The last assumption is based on negative evidence, but it is possible to justify this inference from a contextual approach.

Even though this is the practice the religion prescribes, there are a lot of local variations and adaptations within this general framework. There is always a distinction in grave goods connected to *pasne*, normally the absence or the presence of food. When it is possible to cremate, on the other hand, show a greater variation, and among some of the Magars the distinction between cremation and burial is not connected to one of the orthodox life cycle rituals. However, the change in the widow's status is practiced and expressed in a similar way in all the villages among both Brahmans and Magars. Except from the difference with the jewellery, the treatment of deceased women is similar to that of men within a village when they have the same moral status, whether they are *karma caleko* or not.

Albeit only the orthodox life cycle rituals are possible to trace directly in the mortuary material, other life cycle rituals have a major significance for the deceased's rebirth. *Chaurasi* is in this manner of special importance. The ceremony is celebrated when a person is a thousand full moons old, that is in his or her eighty-fourth year. The old one is worshipped as a living ancestor and a god on this day (Figure 5.4), and the ritual reduces the person's sin. Moreover, after *chaurasi* the old man or woman has an honoured position in the society.