

## Rituals, Service Castes, and Women : Rites of Passage and the Conception of Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness in Northern India

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## **Chapter 9**

# **Rituals, Service Castes, and Women: Rites of Passage and the Conception of Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness in Northern India**

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

#### **1) Points at Issue**

The aim of this article is to consider the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness in rites, and the associated roles of service castes<sup>1)</sup> and women through an analysis of rites of passage in a rural village in northern India. When studying rites in Hindu society, a key to one's understanding of the rite in question is provided by one's grasp of the attributes of the people involved in the rite. There has, however, been little research analyzing rites from such a perspective, and what research there is has largely been based on the perspective of purity/impurity. For example, emphasis has been placed on the priests' association with purification, and although many researchers have pointed out that the Barber caste, the Washerman caste and other low-ranking service castes play important roles in rites, they have been attributed only the negative role of removing the impurity of the higher castes (DUMONT 1980; HARPER 1964; SRINIVAS 1952). In addition, notwithstanding their importance, it has been stated that women do not actively participate in rites because of their impurity, and apart from the research by Inden and Nicholas (1977), Marglin (1985c), and Wadley (1975), there has been virtually no examination of the ritual role of women. Such interpretations are, however, based on L. Dumont's view of purity/impurity, which stressed a Brahman-centred ideology. But in order to consider Hindu society from an all-encompassing viewpoint, a pluralistic approach is necessary, and as an example of such an approach I wish to introduce a perspective focussing on the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness and to analyze rites of passage while taking into account the attributes of those involved in the rites.

Research dealing with rites of passage and the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness has already been undertaken by M.N. Srinivas (1952), R.S. Khare (1976) and others, but because of limited space I shall here touch only on those studies worthy of special note in connection with the subject matter to be considered below.<sup>2)</sup> Dumont (1980) once argued that the concepts of purity and

impurity were conspicuous in rites of passage and that the temporary impurity associated with birth and death was linked to the permanent impurity related to the caste hierarchy. V. Das responded to this by pointing out that although there are specific terms for birth pollution and death pollution, there exist no words for caste pollution, and she judged Dumont's view linking temporary and permanent impurity to be inadequate (DAS 1976: 259). In view of the fact that, among the different facets of impurity to be seen in rites of passage, impurity at birth is auspicious (*śubh*) while the impurity of death is inauspicious (*aśubh*), she also pointed out that impurity cannot be simplistically regarded in negative terms, and she criticized Dumont's standpoint equating the impurity of birth and death (DAS 1982: 128). On the basis of an analysis of rites of passage, Das presented in addition a scheme in which marriage is regarded as auspicious and pure, childbirth as auspicious and impure, death as inauspicious and impure, and ancestor propitiation as inauspicious and pure (DAS 1982: 143).

The concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness were subsequently reevaluated by Marglin (1985b) as concepts representative of the ideology of kingship, located at the pinnacle of the realm of secular affairs, and contrasting with the concepts of purity and impurity, which could be said to represent a Brahman ideology. On the basis of these concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, Marglin analyzed the relationship between kingship and women (*devadāsī*) who serve the gods from the perspective of women's fertility. Although the *devadāsīs* are forbidden to enter the inner sanctum of the Temple of Jagannātha, regarded as pure, they sing auspicious songs on the occasion of rites of passage such as childbirth and weddings and are regarded as auspicious entities. In this manner Marglin clarified the ambiguous nature of the *devadāsī*, who is endowed both with the impurity of women and also with auspiciousness (MARGLIN 1985b: 74). Marglin also argues that because the *devadāsī* is married to a god in a religious sense and is an eternally auspicious woman, through an emphasis on this auspiciousness she becomes a being possessed of the fertility indispensable for the prosperity of the kingdom (*ibid.*).

G.G. Raheja, meanwhile, developed a theory of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness from the standpoint of members of the dominant caste, who fulfill the same functions as a king on the village level, owning as they do the greater part of village land and possessing political and economic power. Raheja defined the *jajmānī* system (a form of division of labour centred on the dominant caste) as a system of ritual relationships in which the service castes have the function of removing inauspiciousness from the families of the dominant caste, lineage members, and even the village as a whole and increasing the village's fertility (RAHEJA 1988a: 24-36). Although the Brahman priest is situated at the apex of the hierarchy in terms of the purity/impurity dichotomy, according to Raheja he receives ritual gifts (*dān*) from the dominant caste on the occasion of rites of passage, thereby becoming a "vessel" (*pātra*) or recipient of the donor's inauspiciousness, and his relative status is thereby diminished. By emphasizing the

ritual connotations of *dān*, Raheja thus views rites of passage as an occasion for removing inauspiciousness and increasing auspiciousness (RAHEJA 1988a: 37).

The studies by Das, Marglin and Raheja all provide useful perspectives for analyzing rites of passage, but each has its problems. Das discusses the character of rites by structurally relating purity and impurity to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, but she doesn't pay sufficient attention to the attributes of those involved in the rites. Marglin, on the other hand, although attaching importance to the auspiciousness of women, limits her observations to women of a special status associated with kingship (*devadāsī*) and does not clarify the relationship between women in general and auspiciousness. Raheja's research merits attention in that it links the caste system to the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, but her analysis of women, with women of the service castes playing important roles in the removal of inauspiciousness and the promotion of auspiciousness, is inadequate.

In the following, therefore, bearing the above points in mind and basing myself on fieldwork on rites of passage in a village in northern India, I propose to clarify the relationship between rites of passage and the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness by focussing firstly on various aspects of concepts associated with rites of passage, secondly on the roles of service castes in these rites, and thirdly on the relationship between the rites and concepts pertaining to women. In particular, by taking into account the arguments of people such as Das, Marglin and Raheja, I wish to reconsider the position and role of the lower service castes and women, which has until now been interpreted in discussions of purity and impurity by means of the concept of permanent impurity.

## 2) A Description of the Village

I conducted fieldwork with the aim of studying rites in a north Indian village for a total of two years between 1985 and 1990. S village, where I carried out my investigations, is situated in the state of Uttar Pradesh and lies about one hundred kilometres northeast of the holy city of Varanasi. Administratively speaking, it belongs to the district (*teshil*) of Azamgarh (see Fig. 1), while linguistically it lies in a region where Bhojpurī, a Hindi dialect, is spoken.

S village is a relatively small village for eastern Uttar Pradesh, having a total of 54 households and a population of 357. The villagers are all Hindus and are composed of three castes, namely, Yādav, Kahār and Camār; as is indicated in Table 1, the Yādavs account for more than two thirds of the population. (In actual practice, the occupational descent groups known as *jāti* function in village life, but for convenience' sake I shall use the term 'caste.')

Traditionally the Yādavs have engaged in selling milk, the Kahārs in carrying water, and the Camārs in tanning, but today the majority of all caste members are farmers. Their chief product is raw sugar, but they also grow wheat, barley, rice, pulse and vegetables such as potatoes, which they send to market in order to earn a cash income.

The Yādavs are one of the so-called backward castes, but today they are

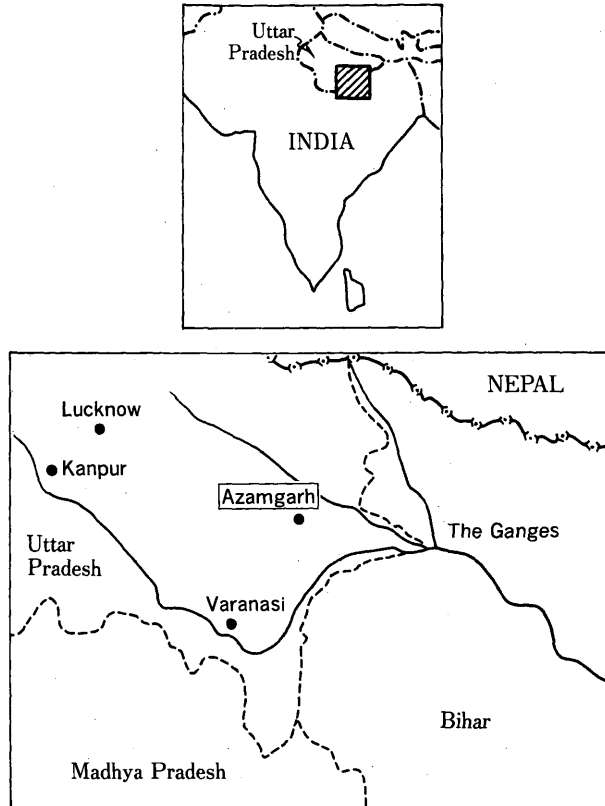


Figure 1. Research Area.

Table 1. Caste Composition of S Village in 1991.

Caste	Male	Female	Total
Yādav	147	99	246
Kahār	3	4	7
Camār	55	49	104
Total	205	152	357

rapidly acquiring social and economic power. It might be mentioned that in March 1991 the state governors of both Uttar Pradesh and Bihar were Yādavs. Yādavs also own about 90% of the land in S village. The Kahārs are another backward caste, but at present there is only one Kahār household in the village, and they have been almost completely assimilated by the Yādavs. The Camārs are one of the scheduled castes recognized by the central government, and they live a little apart from the Yādavs and Kahārs, forming two separate communities to the south and west of the village.

In S village the network of mutual contracts based on the division of labour among castes known as the *jajmānī* system functions around the Yādavs. The Camārs are employed by the Yādavs as farm labourers, and when a child is born, a Camār woman (*camārin*) will act as midwife (*dāī*). The religious worship (*pūjā*) conducted on the occasion of rites of passage and other rites is performed by a professional priest (*paṇḍit*) belonging to the Brahman caste, but there is none residing in S village, and a priest comes whenever necessary from a village to the southwest. Members of the Barber and Washerman service castes also visit S village from villages lying to the southwest and northeast respectively. A Barber (*nāī*) does his round of the village every second week to cut the men's hair, and he also participates in rites of passage, performing various ritual roles. Women of the Barber caste (*naun*) in particular are closely associated with rites of passage, for on the occasion of birth rites, marriage rites and funeral rites they will, for example, apply red paint to the fingernails and toenails of the women directly involved in the rite. The Washerman caste (*dhobī*) normally performs laundry, and its members also play an important role in rites since they will take home to be washed the soiled garments of a woman after she has given birth on the occasion of birth rites and the clothes of the chief mourner and female relatives on the occasion of funeral rites. The roles played by these service castes in different rites will be dealt with in detail below.<sup>3)</sup>

## 2. RITES OF PASSAGE IN A NORTH INDIAN VILLAGE

In the following I shall take up for consideration the rites of passage of the Yādavs, the chief caste in the Bhojpurī-speaking regions. The Yādavs' principal rites of passage are marriage rites, birth rites and funeral rites, and because they do not belong to the "twice-born" (*dvija*), they do not perform the rite for the investiture of the sacred thread. In addition, the coming-of-age ceremony for women to be generally observed among Hindus in south India is not performed in north India. Because it is my intention to devote a separate article to a more detailed consideration of each of the above three rites of passage, here I shall describe only those parts of the ritual process that concern the topic at hand (and for further details of which reference should be made to Tables 2 and 3).

### 1) Marriage Rites

#### (1) Lagan

A marriage partner is selected on the basis of various marriage rules such as caste endogamy, *gotra* exogamy (a *gotra* being a patrilineal descent group going back three generations) or hypergamy, a fortune-teller is consulted to determine the prospective couple's compatibility, and the two parties negotiate the size of the dowry. Once the decision has been made, a betrothal ceremony, called *lagan* or *tilak*, is held at the bridegroom's home. Having chosen an auspicious day, male relatives from both parties decide in the presence of a *paṇḍit* on a date for the

Table 2. The Ritual Process of Rites of Passage.

## 1. Marriage Rites

(1) *Lagan*(2) *Śādī*

- |  |                               |  |
|--|-------------------------------|--|
| (i) Day 1  | 1. <i>urd cāval chānnā</i>    | Sifting ( <i>chānnā</i> ) of urd beans ( <i>urd</i> ) and rice ( <i>cāval</i> ) with winnowing basket.         |
| Day 4  | 2. <i>urd kā dhoiyā dhonā</i> | Washing ( <i>dhoiyā dhonā</i> ) of urd beans.  |
| (ii) Day 6: <i>Maṭmaṅgala</i>                      | 3. <i>kalyān pūjā</i>         | Worship ( <i>pūjā</i> ) in which priest prays for success ( <i>kalyān</i> ) of marriage.                       |
|  | 4. <i>halis gādanā</i>        | Erecting ( <i>gādanā</i> ) of spade ( <i>halis</i> ) in ritual site.   |
|  | 5. <i>kalas' ghoṭnā</i>       | Applying ( <i>ghoṭnā</i> ) of rice, barley and cow dung to earthen jar ( <i>kalas'</i> ).                      |
|  | 6. <i>kūṭnā</i>               | Pounding ( <i>kūṭnā</i> ) of rice with pestle by five married women, who prepare meal for ancestors.           |
|  | 7. <i>chūlī neotā</i>         | Five married women put pounded rice in four clay pots ( <i>chūlī</i> ) and invite ( <i>neotā</i> ) ancestors.  |
|  | 8. <i>cūmā</i>                | Application ( <i>cūmā</i> ) of turmeric to bodies of bride and groom by five unmarried women.                  |
|  | 9. <i>dhoṇḍhī bāndhanā</i>    | Preparation ( <i>bāndhanā</i> ) of mixture of oil, rice and raw sugar, which is given to each village family.  |
|  | 10. <i>imlī ghoṭānā</i>       | Mothers' brothers give bride and groom tamarind ( <i>imlī</i> ) leaves to bite.                                |
|  | 11. <i>sil ponā</i>           | Parents of bride and groom make bread with stone stick ( <i>sil</i> ) for wind and water gods ( <i>ponā</i> ). |
| (iii) Day 7 (morning): Rites at bridegroom's house | 12. <i>pañc baueru</i>        | Five ( <i>pañc</i> ) children eat meal and circle ( <i>baueru</i> ) ritual site five times.                    |
|  | 13. <i>inār byāh</i>          | "Well wedding": groom and mother circle well five times.   |
|  | 14. <i>parichhan</i>          | Circling of pestle, etc., over groom's head by mother.   |
|  | 15. <i>pāmv pūjā</i>          | Worship ( <i>pūjā</i> ) of groom's feet ( <i>pāmv</i> ) by family members.                                     |
|  | 16. <i>nākhūn rangāiha</i>    | Painting ( <i>rangāiha</i> ) of groom's nails ( <i>nākhūn</i> ) red by <i>naun</i> .                           |
| (iv) Day 7 (afternoon): Rites at bride's house     | 17. <i>aguvāni</i>            | Welcoming ( <i>aguvāni</i> ) of groom to ritual site by bride's father.  |
|  | 18. <i>tāj pahirānā</i>       | Placing ( <i>pahirānā</i> ) of crown ( <i>tāj</i> ) on groom's head by bride's relatives.                      |
|  | 19. <i>inār byāh</i>          | "Well wedding": bride and mother circle well five times.   |
|  | 20. <i>parichhan</i>          | Circling of pestle, etc., over bride's head by mother.   |
|  | 21. <i>nākhūn rangātha</i>    | Painting ( <i>rangātha</i> ) of bride's nails ( <i>nākhūn</i> ) red by <i>naun</i> .                           |
| (v) Day 7: <i>Byāh</i>                             | 22. <i>chunrī</i>             | Presentation of gifts in basket ( <i>chunrī</i> ) by groom's family to bride's family.                         |
|  | 23. <i>kanyā dān</i>          | Bride's father makes gift ( <i>dān</i> ) of daughter ( <i>kanyā</i> ) to groom.                                |
|  | 24. <i>pāmv pūjā</i>          | Worship ( <i>pūjā</i> ) of bride's and groom's feet ( <i>pāmv</i> ) by bride's                                 |

**Table 2.** (Contd.) The Ritual Process of Rites of Passage.

		parents and relatives.
	25. <i>lāvā parichhan</i>	Pouring of parched barley ( <i>lāvā</i> ) by bride's brothers through bamboo frame held by bride and groom.
	26. <i>sindūr dān</i>	Gift ( <i>dān</i> ) of red powder ( <i>sindūr</i> ) by groom to parting in bride's hair.
	27. <i>kohbār khānā</i>	Bride and groom are given yoghurt and raw sugar to eat ( <i>khānā</i> ) in nuptial chamber ( <i>kohbār</i> ).
(vi) Day 8	28. <i>khiçṛī khānā</i>	Bride's relatives give groom <i>khiçṛī</i> to eat ( <i>khānā</i> ).
	29. <i>acara dharānā</i>	Bride's female relatives give presents to groom.
	30. <i>maṇḍap utarnā</i>	Groom's relatives dismantle ( <i>utarnā</i> ) ritual site ( <i>maṇḍap</i> ) and remove "marriage pole," etc.
	31. <i>naktoriya</i>	Women gather at groom's house to sing and dance.
(vii) Day 9	32. <i>maur servana</i>	Bride, or groom and mothers discard crown ( <i>maur</i> ), etc., used during <i>byāh</i> and announce marriage to village gods.
(3) <i>Gaunā</i>		
	1. <i>parichhan</i>	Circling of pestle, etc., five times over groom's head by bride's mother.
	2. <i>acara dharānā</i>	Bride's female relatives give presents to groom.
	3. <i>parichhan</i>	Circling of pestle, etc., five times over bride's head by groom's mother.
	4. <i>kohbār khānā</i>	Bride and groom are given yoghurt and raw sugar to eat ( <i>khānā</i> ) in nuptial chamber ( <i>kohbār</i> ).
(4) <i>Doge</i>		
	1. <i>parichhan</i>	Circling of pestle, etc., five times over groom's head by bride's mother.
	2. <i>acara dharānā</i>	Bride's female relatives give presents to groom.
	3. <i>parichhan</i>	Circling of pestle, etc., five times over bride's head by bride's mother.
	4. <i>kohbār khānā</i>	Bride and groom are given yoghurt and raw sugar to eat ( <i>khānā</i> ) in nuptial chamber ( <i>kohbār</i> ).

## 2. Birth Rites

### (1) Childbirth

- (i) *Pregnancy* Pregnant woman is subjected to behavioural constraints, e.g., not cutting her nails and not travelling far afield.
- (ii) *Delivery* Barley or wheat is divided into two parts in order to ensure an easy delivery.
- (iii) *Sauriya* Mother and newborn baby remain in confinement room (*sauriya*) in care of midwife.
- (iv) *Chathī* (6th day) Midwife bathes mother and child, and *naun* paints their nails red; *chathī pūjā* performed at night.
- (v) *Going outside* Talisman is tied around child's neck, and mother and child go outdoors and commence normal life.
- (vi) *Bārahī* (12th day) Celebrations for birth of boy.

### (2) *Kardhān*

six or seven months after birth, protective cord (*kardhān*) is tied to child's waist.



Table 2. (Contd.) The Ritual Process of Rites of Passage.

(3) Muṇḍan	Child's first haircut ( <i>muṇḍan</i> ) is performed beside the Ganges.
<b>3. Funeral Rites</b>	
(1) Funeral	
(i) <i>Dāg denā</i>	Cremation ( <i>dāg denā</i> ) of body beside the Ganges.
(ii) <i>Ghānt bamdanā</i>	Earthen pot ( <i>ghānt</i> ) containing drinking water for the deceased is tied ( <i>bamdanā</i> ) to mango tree.
(iii) <i>Pinḍa palnā</i>	Deceased is given food offerings ( <i>pinḍa</i> ) to eat ( <i>palnā</i> ).
(iv) <i>Bāl banavānā</i>	<i>Mahā pātra</i> breaks earthen pot and <i>nāī</i> shaves and arranges ( <i>banavānā</i> ) hair ( <i>bāl</i> ) of chief mourner and deceased's male relatives.
(v) <i>Terahī</i> (13th day)	Deceased's relatives, villagers, <i>paṇḍit</i> , <i>nāī</i> , etc., are given a meal.
(vi) <i>Tīn pakś</i> (15th day)	Deceased's relatives bathe and chief mourner offers food to the deceased.
(2) Memorial Service	One year after the death, the relatives bathe and make offerings to the deceased while the <i>paṇḍit</i> conducts a memorial service.

marriage and discuss how to share the expenses of the marriage rites. Following these discussions, everyone takes a meal together, and during the meal female relatives and neighbours sing songs blessing the marriage (*vivāh kā gīt*).

In S village the marriage rites are divided into three stages, namely, *sādī*, *gaunā*, and *doge* or *donge*. *Sādī*, corresponding to the first stage, is performed when the male partner is sixteen to seventeen years old and the female partner fourteen to fifteen years old. It consists of a series of rites lasting more than one week, and among these rites the most important for gaining social recognition as man and wife is that called *byāh*. These *sādī* rites are usually performed prior to the girl's first menstrual period. *Gaunā*, representing the second stage, is performed two or three years after the *sādī* rites, and the bride spends three days at the bridegroom's house and then returns home. The third stage, called *doge*, takes place six months to one year after the *gaunā* rites, and the bride and groom now enter into actual married life. At each stage of the marriage rites particular songs are sung by women on the occasion of each individual rite.

## (2) The Śādī Rites

### (i) Rites on the First and Fourth Days

On the first day of the *sādī* rites female relatives and neighbours sift *urd* beans and rice with winnowing baskets at the homes of both the bride and groom, singing songs as they do so (*urd cāval chānnā*; for the sake of simplicity, the names of individual rites, which are given in Table 2, will be omitted hereafter in the main text). Each night until the seventh day women from the two families and female neighbours sing songs blessing the marriage. On the fourth day the women, again singing, perform a rite in which they wash and pod the *urd* beans and peel their black skins. As is suggested by the acts of sifting out the husks with winnowing

Table 3. The Ritual Process of *Śādi*.

	Bride's House	Groom's House
Day 1	1. <i>urd cāval chānnā</i>	1. <i>urd cāval chānnā</i>
Day 4	2. <i>urd kā dhoiyā dhonā</i>	2. <i>urd kā dhoiyā dhonā</i>
Day 6	Maṭmaṅgala 3. <i>kalyān pūjā</i> 4. <i>halis gādanā</i> 5. <i>kalas' ghoṭnā</i> 6. <i>kūṭnā</i> 7. <i>chūlī neotā</i> 8. <i>cūmā</i> 9. <i>dhoṇḍhī bāndhanā</i> 10. <i>imlī ghoṭānā</i> 11. <i>sil ponā</i>	Maṭmaṅgala 3. <i>kalyān pūjā</i> 4. <i>halis gādanā</i> 5. <i>kalas' ghoṭnā</i> 6. <i>kūṭnā</i> 7. <i>chūlī neotā</i> 8. <i>cūmā</i> 9. <i>dhoṇḍhī bāndhanā</i> 10. <i>imlī ghoṭānā</i> 11. <i>sil ponā</i>
Day 7		12. <i>pañc baueru</i> 13. <i>inār byāh</i> 14. <i>parichhan</i> 15. <i>pāmv pūjā</i> 16. <i>nākhūn raṅgātha</i>
	17. <i>aguvāni</i> 18. <i>tāj pahirānā</i> 19. <i>inār byāh</i> 20. <i>parichhan</i> 21. <i>nākhūn raṅgātha</i> <i>Byāh</i> 22. <i>chunrī</i> 23. <i>pāmv pūjā</i> 24. <i>kanyā dān</i> 25. <i>lāvā paricchan</i> 26. <i>sindūr dān</i> 27. <i>kohbar khānā</i>	Departure of bridegroom's procession
Day 8	28. <i>khiṅṅrī khānā</i> 29. <i>acara dharānā</i>	31. <i>naktoriya</i>
Day 9	30. <i>maṅḍap utarnā</i> 32. <i>maur servana</i>	Return of bridegroom's procession 32. <i>maur servana</i>

baskets and removing the black skins of the *urd* beans, these two rites have the symbolic meaning of removing all obstacles from the marriage rites. During the time when the marriage rites are being conducted the bride and groom are considered to be in the most beautiful state in which they will find themselves in their entire lives; and they are therefore thought to be easily possessed by evil spirits. For this reason, they observe behavioural rules such as wearing soiled garments until the commencement of the *byāh* rite, avoiding long journeys, and



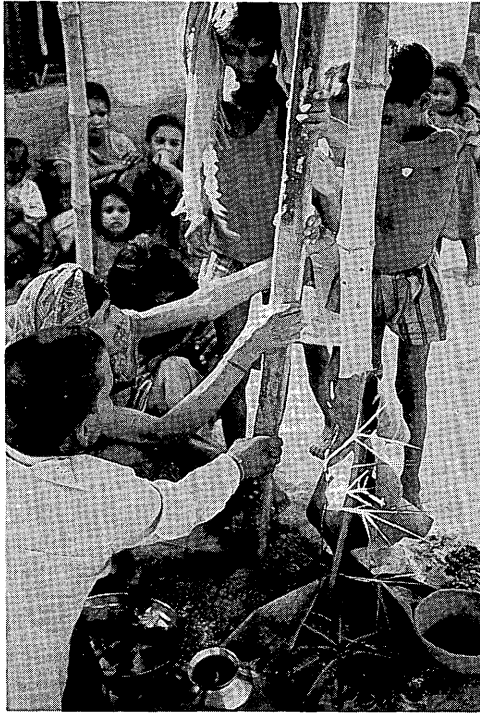
**Plate 1.** The *urd cāval chānnā*; female ravalites and neighbours sift *urd* beans and rice by winnowing baskets with singing songs.

always carrying on their person an iron container, said to be effective in warding off evil spirits.

(ii) *Rites on the Sixth Day (Maṭmaṅgala)*

The sixth day is called the day of the *maṭmaṅgala* (*maṭ*: “earth;” *maṅgala*: “auspicious”), and a series of rites in preparation for the *byāh* are performed at the homes of the bride and groom. First, the *paṇḍit* prays for the successful conclusion of the marriage and ties cords (*kaṅghā*) for warding off evil spirits to the right wrists of the bride and groom. Next, a Washerwoman (*naun*) purifies part of the courtyard with cow dung and draws auspicious patterns on the ground, transforming it into a ritual site (*maṇḍap*), where five villagers erect a spade in the ground. This spade is called the “marriage pole,” and the *naun* smears it with turmeric (*haldī*) and cow dung. An uneven number of wooden parrots, regarded as symbols of good luck, are attached to the top of this pole, and an earthen jar (*kalas*) containing holy water from the Ganges and turmeric and covered with five mango leaves is placed next to it. The womenfolk rub cow dung and barley onto this jar, singing as they do so.<sup>4)</sup>

A rite for inviting the ancestors is then performed by married women. Five women pound rice with a pestle, and after they have prepared a meal for the ancestors, they place the rice in four pots, circling them five times in a counterclockwise direction as they do so. At the same time they sing a song to invoke the past three generations of patrilineal ancestors. Then five unmarried women take turns to apply turmeric to five places on the bodies of the bride and groom, thereby blessing them. This is the only rite performed by unmarried



**Plate 2.** The *halis gādanā*; five villagers including a *paṇḍit* and a bridegroom erect a spade called “the marriage pole” smearing with turmeric and cow dung.

women. The mothers’ brothers (*māmā*) give the bride and groom tamarind (*imlī*) leaves to bite five times. In the evening the parents of the bride and groom, shrouded in a cloth, make a type of bread called *capātī* with kneaded flour. The purpose of this is both to ask the wind god (*pavan devatā*) and water god (*varuṇ devatā*) for a successful marriage and also to invite the ancestors (*pitṛ*). The womenfolk again sing a song for invoking the ancestors.

### (iii) *Rites at the Bridegroom’s House on the Morning of the Seventh Day*

The bridegroom, his male relatives and the village menfolk set out on a procession in order to take part in the *byāh* to be performed at the bride’s home. Prior to their departure, several rites are performed for the groom by the *naun* and other womenfolk. First, five children, including the groom, are given a meal, whereupon they walk around the ritual site five times in a counterclockwise direction. Next, the groom, accompanied by his mother, circles the well five times, again in a counterclockwise direction, and prays to the water god for a successful marriage. Then his mother, taking in turn a winnowing basket, the edge of a sari, a wooden pestle for pounding rice, a stone roller for crushing spices, a yoghurt churn-dasher, and an earthen pot, circles them five times each in a counterclockwise



**Plate 3.** The *kūtnā*; five married women pounding of rice with pestle, who prepare meal for ancestors.

direction over the groom's head. These objects are all called "auspicious articles," and this series of actions is performed in the hope that the groom too will acquire them in the future. The groom then bathes, and the *naun* washes him with turmeric and soap and dresses him in wedding clothes. After having bathed, the groom breaks a small earthen vessel with his left foot so as to drive away evil spirits. Lastly, the *naun* paints his fingernails and toenails red (*abīr*), which symbolizes prosperity and longevity. While she is doing this, female relatives circle a small sum of money five times over the groom's head, and this money is later given to the *naun*. By giving the money to the *naun*, the groom is said to be freed of misfortune. The groom and his party then set out for the bride's house.

(iv) *Rites at the Bride's House on the Afternoon of the Seventh Day*

When the groom's party reaches the bride's house, the *paṇḍits* of both families welcome the groom to the ritual site and chant *mantra*. After the bride's relatives have placed a paper crown on his head, he then leaves the ritual site, and a series of rites is performed for the bride. First, she and her mother walk around the well five times. Next, the mother circles a winnowing basket, pestle and other auspicious articles five times each over the bride's head. The *naun* then bathes the bride and washes her with turmeric and soap. When doing so, she pours over the bride the water used when bathing the groom, and the bride then breaks an earthen vessel with her left foot. She removes her *śalvār qamīz* (the long one-piece dress and trousers worn by unmarried women) and dons a sari for the first time. Lastly, the *naun* paints the bride's fingernails and toenails red. While she is doing this, female

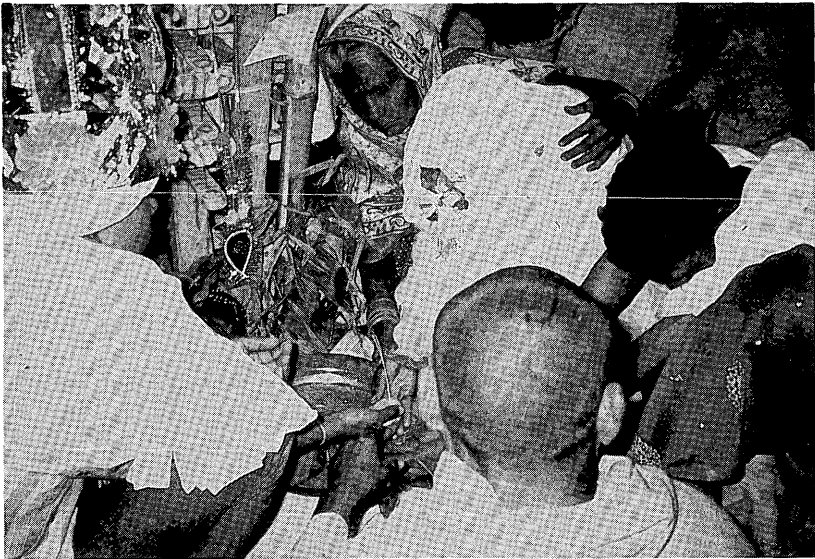


**Plate 4.** The *nākhūn raṅgāṭhā*; the washerwoman (*naun*) paints the fingernails and toenails of a bridegroom.

relatives again circle some money five times over the bride's head, and this is later given to the *naun*.

(v) *The Byāh on the Seventh Day*

The most important ritual, called *byāh*, begins in the evening and continues into the night. The groom enters the ritual site riding an elephant, which is a symbol of Gaṇeśa, the god of good fortune. Then the groom and relatives from both families take their seats in the ritual site, and the groom's family presents a basket containing a sari, bangles, etc., to the bride's family. The bride, accompanied by the *naun*, then makes her entrance. The groom sits facing east, and the bride sits opposite him. The bride's parents and relatives bless the bride and groom by touching their feet. Next, the bride's father takes the groom's hand and lays it on the bride's hand, thereby giving his daughter to the groom. The bride's brothers then pour parched barley through a bamboo frame held by the bride and groom. This expresses the wish that the couple may overcome future difficulties just as easily as the barley passes through the bamboo frame. At about midnight the groom applies a red powder (*sindūr*) to the bride's head, and by this action the marriage is in effect concluded.<sup>5)</sup> Once the marriage has been concluded, relatives from both sides scatter rice in blessing. The bride's female relatives lead the bride and groom to the nuptial chamber, where the female relatives take the bride's fingers and guide her in giving the groom a mouthful of yoghurt and raw sugar, believed to be auspicious. The same action is then repeated with the bride and groom reversing their roles.



**Plate 5.** The *pāmv pūjā*; the bride parents worship for a bride and a bridegroom by touching their feet.

(vi) *Rites on the Eighth Day*

On the eighth day a rite is performed in which the groom is given a dish of *khicrī*, made of rice mixed with *urd* beans. If he is satisfied with the dowry (*dahej*) given by the bride's family, he will eat it immediately, but otherwise he will refuse it, and relatives from both sides will attempt to make him eat it. Then the bride's female relatives and neighbours present the groom with a comb, mirror and other articles for daily use and a small amount of paper money. The menfolk from the groom's side remove the "marriage pole" and the wooden parrots from the ritual site, whereupon the groom's party returns home. In the afternoon a gathering of women only, called *naktoriya*, is held at the groom's house, with his female relatives being the main participants. Pairs of women impersonating the bride and groom sing and dance as they bring their hips together in imitations of sexual acts.

(vii) *Rites on the Ninth Day*

On the afternoon of the ninth day, rites signifying the completion of the first stage of the marriage rites are performed at the homes of the bride and groom. The bride, groom and their mothers, accompanied by the *naun*, go to the well, and after they have buried the crown and some of the mango leaves and cow dung used during the *byāh* beside the well, they visit the shrines of each of the village gods to announce that the marriage has been concluded without mishap. At the same time female relatives and neighbours sing songs and perform dances imitating sexual acts.



Plate 6. The *naktoriya*; women gather at a bridegroom's house to sing and dance.

### (3) *The Gaunā Rites*

The *gaunā* rites, representing the second stage of the marriage rites, are performed two to three years after the *sādī* rites. Having selected an auspicious day, the groom and four or five of his male relatives go to fetch the bride. At the bride's house, her mother circles a winnowing basket, pestle and other auspicious articles over the groom's head. The groom and his companions stay the night, and on the following day after the midday meal the bride's female relatives and neighbours present the groom with articles for daily use and feed him yoghurt and raw sugar. While they are doing so, the *naun* bathes the bride and dresses her in a new sari. She also paints the bride's fingernails and toenails red, makes her face up, applying lamp black (*kājal*) around the eyes, and prepares her for departure. Carrying an iron container for *kājal* (*kājalota*) in order to ward off evil spirits, the bride gets into a litter and sets out for the groom's house accompanied by the *naun*. At the groom's house a welcoming rite is performed, and in the nuptial chamber the bride and groom are given yoghurt and raw sugar to eat. They then visit the village shrines to pay their respects, and after having spent only three days at the groom's house, the bride returns home.

### (4) *The Doge Rites*

The *doge* rites, representing the third stage of the marriage rites, are performed six months to one year after the *gaunā* rites. The groom and several male relatives go to fetch the bride. As women neighbours sing songs, the bride's mother circles a winnowing basket, a wooden pestle and other auspicious articles over the groom's



head. The groom and his companions stay the night, and on the following day after the midday meal the bride's female relatives and neighbours present the groom with articles for daily use. The bride, accompanied by the *naun*, then goes to the groom's house, and upon her arrival the groom's female relatives circle auspicious articles over her head. In the nuptial chamber the bride and groom are given yoghurt and raw sugar to eat. From this day hence the bride starts attending to her household duties.

## 2) Birth Rites

### (1) *Childbirth*

#### (i) *Pregnancy*

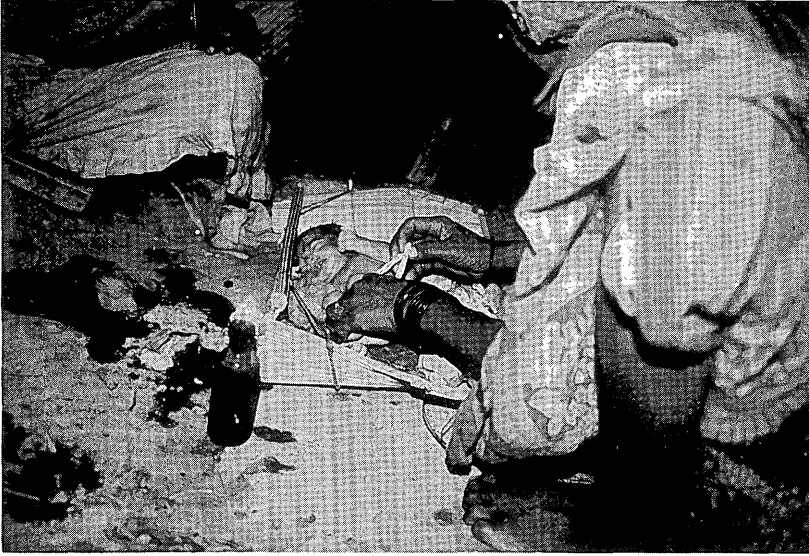
If a woman misses her period for two months, she is considered to be pregnant. Because a pregnant woman is thought to be in a dangerous state in which she is vulnerable to evil spirits, she is subjected to various behavioural constraints from the time when her pregnancy is confirmed or in some cases just one month prior to the expected date of birth, and she is, for example, forbidden to cut her nails or apply *kājal* and avoids going far from a house. It is believed that if she violates these rules, she will give birth to a physically impaired child. No such behavioural constraints are imposed upon the husband as a result of his spouse's pregnancy.

#### (ii) *Delivery*

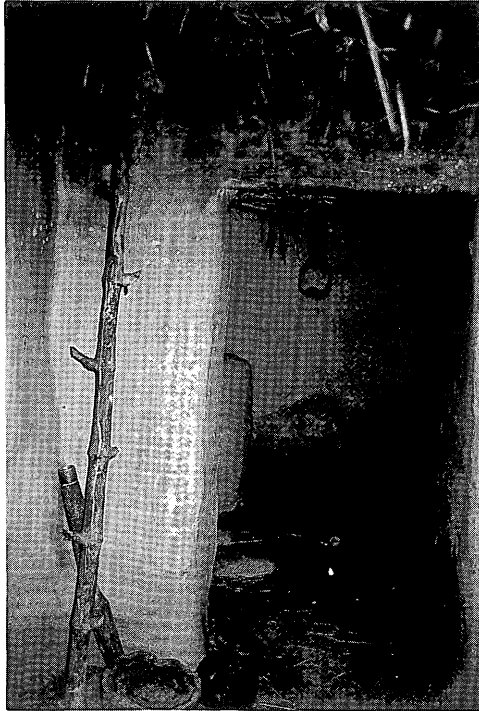
With the onset of labour pains, womenfolk of the family purify the confinement room with cow dung. The woman in labour is made to lie down on an old cloth spread over a wooden bed or over the floor, and her mother-in-law and the wives of her brothers-in-law assist with the delivery. The menfolk and children go outside to await the birth. Before the labour pains become too intense, and in order to ensure an easy delivery, some barley or wheat is divided into two parts, the woman's hair is combed, and all knots in the house are untied. These actions are all considered to widen the birth canal. The midwife is summoned immediately before or after the child is born, and the newborn baby is wrapped in a cloth and placed in a winnowing basket. The midwife then cuts the umbilical cord with a razor blade or cogon-grass. After having cut the umbilical cord, the midwife uses ashes to staunch the flow of blood and then massages the mother and baby with rapeseed oil. If the baby is a boy, women from the immediate neighbourhood gather at the house upon hearing the news and sing a song of felicitation called *sohar*. This is repeated every evening until the twelfth day after birth.

#### (iii) *Sauriya*

The mother and baby remain in the confinement room for six days, and this period of confinement is called *sauriya*. The period until they bathe on the sixth day is called *chūthār*, the literal meaning of which is "not touching." This is because the mother has lost large amounts of unclean blood during delivery. Upon the arrival of the midwife, all the other women leave the confinement room, and for



**Plate 7.** Delivery; the new born baby placed in a winnowing basket, the midwife (*dāī*) cuts the umbilical cord.



**Plate 8.** The confinement room; a lamp is kept continuously burning inside the room and a pestle containing iron is stood against the entrance in order to prevent evil spirits.

six days the midwife attends to all the needs of the mother and child apart from the preparation of meals. Immediately after the delivery a lamp is lit inside the confinement room and kept burning for either six days or one month, and a pestle and other implements containing iron, as well as an earthen pot covered with soot, are placed beside the entrance to the room for a similar period. These are all measures to keep evil spirits away. The midwife remains all day in attendance on the mother and child, and whenever she leaves the room, she carries an iron object on her person. During this period the mother and child are considered to be in a state of extreme danger, and the villagers fear that they may fall victim to an illness called *jamogu*,<sup>6)</sup> which is caused by the incursions of evil spirits.

(iv) *Chañhī* ("Sixth Day")

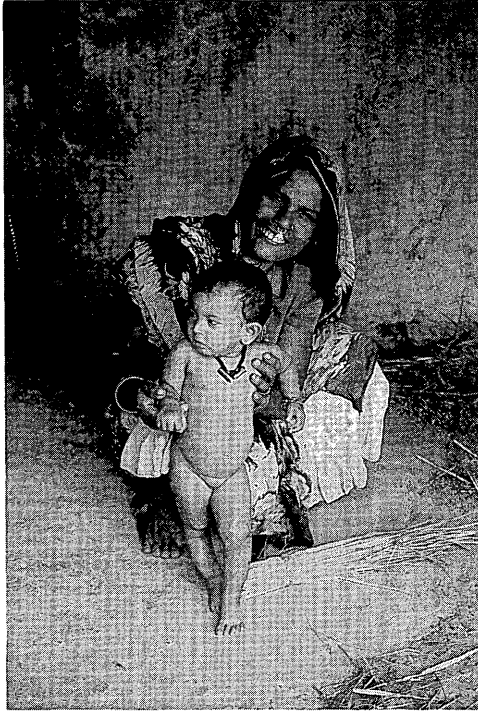
The sixth day after delivery is called *chañhī*, and on this day the mother and child are bathed by the midwife for the first time since the child's birth. Women of the same caste come with rice and *dūb* grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) to congratulate them. The mother and child are washed using stalks of *dūb* grass, which is considered to be pure. A washerwoman now comes to collect the sari, blouse and petticoat worn by the mother ever since the birth and takes them away to be washed. The mother changes into a new sari, and the child is also wrapped in a fresh cloth. As a result of having been bathed by the midwife, the mother and child are said to have been made pure. In the evening a rite called *chañhī pūjā* is performed. A lamp is lit in the confinement room and a small hole is made in the floor, and into this hole pulse, milk, rice and sugar-cane juice are poured. People pray for the child's future happiness, placing objects such as golden decorations, books, clothes and money around the hole, and prayers are offered up to the goddess *Chañhī Māī*.

(v) *Going outside*

At an auspicious time chosen by a *pañḍit*, the mother and child venture outside. This usually takes place seven or eight days after the birth of the child, and once they have bathed, a *naun* cuts their nails and paints them red, a sign of good fortune. The mother purifies the confinement room and the rest of the house with cow dung and from this day forth returns to her household duties. The child is massaged with oil, and a talisman called *jantar* and consisting of a copper cylinder containing a *mantra* inscribed by the *pañḍit* is tied with a black string around the child's neck in order to protect the child from evil spirits.

(vi) *Bārahī* ("Twelfth Day")

If the child is a boy, a celebratory rite called *bārahī* is performed on the twelfth day after his birth. Fifty to sixty people, made up of a *pañḍit*, relatives and neighbours, are invited, and they are treated to *pūri* (a type of deep-fried bread), *khicrī*, *urd*-bean soup, etc. A *naun* bathes the mother and paints her nails red. She also massages the baby boy, paints his nails red, and circles his eyes with *kājal*. In the case of a girl, she is simply made pretty by painting her nails red.



**Plate 9.** Going outside; the baby is wearing a talisman around his neck in order to protect from evil spirits.

**(2) *The Kardhān Rite***

Six or seven months after the child's birth, when the upper teeth have appeared, an auspicious day is chosen to tie a cord (*kardhān*) to the child's waist. The child's first cord is made by twisting five or six threads from the waist cords of the mother's brothers together with some new threads. On this day the child is also given baby food for the first time.

**(3) *The Muṇḍan Rite***

About one year after the child's birth, an auspicious day is chosen to take the child to the banks of the Ganges for his first haircut (*muṇḍan*). After a *paṇḍit* has performed a *pūjā*, a *nāī* shaves his head, leaving only a few strands of hair on the crown of his head. Female relatives sing songs while this is being done.

**3) Funeral Rites**

**(1) *The Funeral***

**(i) *Cremation (Dāg Denā)***

The body of the deceased is laid out on a wooden bed with the head towards the south, and it is purified with holy water and oil. If the deceased is male, a *nāī*

dresses the body in a new *dhōṭī*, and if female, in a new sari. In addition, if the deceased is an elderly man, a *naun* applies *tilak* to his forehead, while if the deceased is a woman with grown-up children who is survived by her husband, the *naun* paints her nails red and applies *sindūr*. During this time, female relatives of the deceased and village womenfolk assemble and begin wailing. This ritual wailing (*syāpā*) by women continues until the thirteenth day after death. The body, wrapped in a white shroud, is placed on a stretcher made of bamboo poles, to which it is secured with a rope. It is considered auspicious for a woman to predecease her husband, and in such a case the body is additionally wrapped in a red cloth.

The body is carried by *Camār* men to the village boundary. Then male relatives and other men from the same caste as the deceased, numbering several dozen in all, transport the body by tractor to the cremation site beside a tributary of the Ganges. The deceased's eldest son, husband or male relative acts as chief mourner, and after he has circled the body, now placed on the funeral pyre, five times in a counterclockwise direction, he sets light to the pyre. While the body is burning, he breaks the skull with a bamboo stick, and the deceased's spirit (*pret*) is believed to leave the body at this moment. After the cremation, the ashes are cast into the river. Upon returning home, the chief mourner chews and spits out several capsicums, and he then drinks some water. The women family members and relatives, meanwhile, have been waiting at the house, and they bathe at the same time as the cremation is judged to have taken place. The deceased's family eats nothing on this day. A woman who has been widowed has her bangles broken by other widows and is divested of all her personal accessories. A widow is considered to be inauspicious, and married women must not touch her.

#### (ii) *The Ghānt Bāmdhnā Rite*

On the day after the death, a rite called *ghānt bāmdhnā* ("tying the *ghānt*") is performed. In the afternoon a *paṇḍit* and a *nāī* come and make a *ghānt* in the open space to the north of the village. A *ghānt* is an earthen pot with a small hole in the bottom, and it is filled with water and suspended from the branch of a mango tree. The spirit of the deceased is said to drink this water daily. The deceased's family eats only bean soup and rice on this day. Every day for nine days if a woman has died, or for ten days if a man has died, the chief mourner bathes at noon and fills the *ghānt* with water, and then in the evening he lights a lamp underneath it. During this period the chief mourner wears only a waist cloth and wooden clogs, and the upper half of his body is left bare. He carries a stick in his hand for warding off evil spirits, keeps an iron object on his person, and sleeps directly on the floor. The widow does not dress her hair during this period, and she wears the same clothes the whole time. This nine- or ten-day period after death is called *śuddak*, and because it is regarded as impure, people do not drink water or eat meals at the house of the deceased. Relatives and friends come to offer their condolences (*angana karnā*), but they avoid Sundays and Tuesdays since these are inauspicious days. During this period the spirit of the deceased is in a state of



**Plate 10.** The *ghānt bāmdhnā*; earthen pot containing drinking water for the deceased is tied mango tree.

limbo, which is considered to be extremely dangerous for the chief mourner and the relatives of the deceased. By performing a special rite on the ninth day in the case of a woman and on the tenth day in the case of a man, the spirit of the deceased becomes an ancestral spirit (*pitṛ*).

(iii) *The Piṇḍa Palnā Rite*

On the second day after the death, a rite called *piṇḍa palnā* ("feeding with *piṇḍas*") is performed. A *naun* bathes the female relatives at home and rubs them down with oil. In the open space to the north of the village, a *nār* shaves the chief mourner's hair and bathes him, and a *paṇḍit* then performs a *pūjā*, with the chief mourner sitting facing south and the *paṇḍit* facing east. Round balls called *piṇḍā* are made from a mixture of flour, milk, honey and ghee, and they are placed on a mango leaf, nine if the deceased was a woman and ten if the deceased was a man. They are said to be consumed by the spirit of the deceased, and they are offered so that the deceased will not bring misfortune to the surviving family.

(iv) *The Bāl Banavānā Rite*

On the ninth or tenth day after the death, a rite called *bāl banavānā*

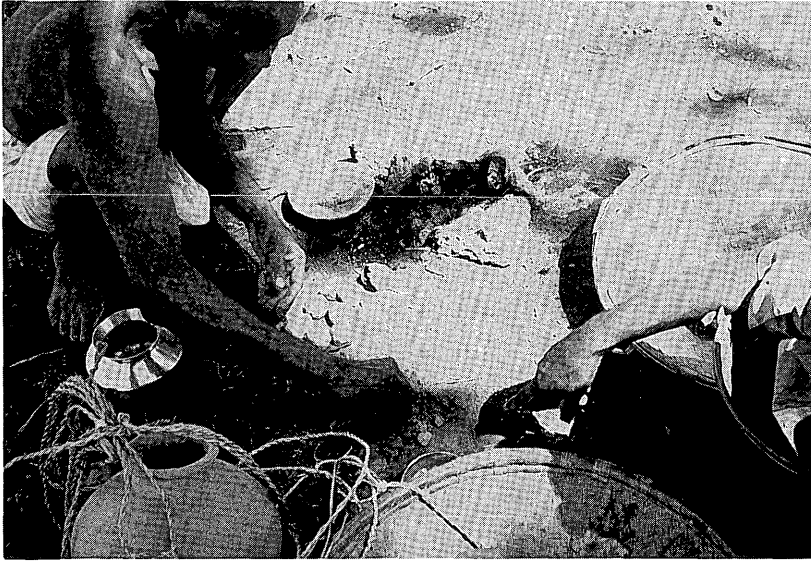


Plate 11. The *pinḍa palnā*; deceased is given food offering to eat.

(“arranging the hair”) is performed. Early in the morning a *naun* purifies the inside of the house with cow dung, and the women of the household bathe. The *naun* then rubs oil into their hair, applies *sindūr* to their foreheads, and paints their fingernails and toenails red. The menfolk of the family and male relatives gather in the open space to the north of the village, where a *nāī* shaves their hair, moustaches and beards. The ensuing rite is conducted not by an ordinary *paṇḍit*, but by a special *paṇḍit* called a *mahā pātra*. After having performed a service for the deceased, the *mahā pātra* rubs himself with oil, drinks ghee, and breaks the *ghānt*. However, before agreeing to break it, he demands saris and money. Once the *ghānt* has been broken, the family of the deceased is called *bhāī bandh* (“joined to brothers”) and reverts to the same position as other households, that is to say, it returns to normal life. From this day hence the pollution associated with death disappears from the family of the deceased. The chief mourner, accompanied by four other men, places the hearth, sickle and other implements that the family has been using until now in a basket and discards them on the village boundary. He does not do this alone because of a deadly fear of the spirit of the deceased.

(v) *Terahī* (“Thirteenth Day”)

The thirteenth day after death is called *terahī*, and the deceased’s relatives bathe and *paṇḍits* perform a service. A *naun* places a water jar in the courtyard, and female relatives use this water to wash their hands. When doing so, they place a small sum of money next to the jar, and this is later given to the *naun*. The *paṇḍit*, *nāī*, *dhobī*, *camār*, relatives and villagers are treated to a meal of *pūrī* and



**Plate 12.** The *bāl banavāna*; the funeral priest (*mahā pātra*) performs a *pūjā* for a chief mourner, and by accepting *dān* as gifts for the deceased, he rids the chief mourner and other relatives of inauspicious.

vegetable curry. The meal given to the *paṇḍits* is specifically referred to as *brahm bhoj* ("Brahman's meal"), and it is prepared by one of the *paṇḍits* and partaken of by four or five *paṇḍits*.

(vi) *Tin Pakś* ("Three Five-Day Periods")

The fifteenth day is called *tīn pakś*, and the deceased's relatives bathe and a *naun* paints the fingernails and toenails of the female relatives red. A *paṇḍit* is not summoned for this rite, and the chief mourner purifies part of the courtyard with cow dung and offers food to the deceased.

(2) *Memorial Service (Śrāddhā)*

One year after the death a memorial service for the deceased, called *śrāddhā* or *khorsī*, is performed on an auspicious day. The deceased's relatives bathe and a *naun* paints the fingernails and toenails of the female relatives red. Offerings are made to the deceased, and *paṇḍits* perform a service. The *paṇḍits* and relatives are then given a meal. In the case of a wealthy family, this rite may be performed at Varanasi or some other holy site along the Ganges.



### 3. OBSERVATIONS

#### 1) The Structure of Rites of Passage

##### (1) *The Danger of Evil Spirits*

In undertaking the following analysis of rites of passage, I first wish to examine which concepts are given special emphasis in the course of the rites. If we focus on the central figures in these rites of passage, that is, the bride and bridegroom, the mother and her newborn baby, and the chief mourner, it becomes clear that there are behavioural patterns common to each rite. These are, namely, the observance of non-everyday activities during the course of the rites, such as continuing to wear soiled clothes, not cutting one's nails, keeping an iron object on one's person, and, in the case of a woman, not combing her hair, not using *sindūr* and other forms of makeup, and removing personal accessories. Hitherto these liminal states to be observed in rites have been explained by linking them to impurity (DAS 1976: 257–258). But impurity does not occur in the case of marriage rites. Although there is a strong awareness of purity and impurity in rites of passage, if we include marriage rites in our purview, these states cannot be automatically linked to impurity. In the case of rites of passage, there is rather a common awareness of the danger of being attacked by evil spirits.<sup>7)</sup>

Let us consider the dangers emanating from evil spirits in each rite of passage. Firstly, in the case of childbirth, the first six days until *chaṭhi* are called *chūtihār* because of the discharging of unclean effluvia such as blood, and the mother and child are not allowed to leave the confinement room. During this period they are considered to be in an extremely dangerous state in which they are susceptible to attacks from evil spirits. A newborn baby has a special appeal and is easily attacked by evil spirits (*bhūt*). At the same time, the mother who has given birth to such a child is said to be especially vulnerable to attacks by the afflicted spirits of women who have died in childbirth (*mehrarū kā bhūt*).<sup>8)</sup> For this reason a lamp is kept continuously burning in the confinement room and a pestle containing iron is stood against the entrance in order to prevent evil spirits from entering. The mother and child are protected from evil spirits by remaining in the confinement room. It is thus inadequate to simply say that they are kept in confinement because they are impure.

Next, after someone has died, the first nine or ten days are considered to be impure, and people stay away from the house of the deceased. But the body of the deceased is not itself impure, and it is in fact sacred and must be protected from attacks by evil spirits (DAS 1986: 192). During the period of mourning, which is regarded as impure, the relatives of the deceased, especially the chief mourner, are considered to be in grave peril because of their vulnerability to attacks from the spirits of the dead and evil spirits (*bhūt-pret*) still attached to the world of the living (PARRY 1980: 91). The chief mourner therefore keeps an iron object on his person and carries a stick for warding off evil spirits in his hand.

Marriage differs from childbirth and death in that it does not give rise to impurity. But during the period in which the marriage rites are being conducted, the bride and groom are considered to be "imperiled because they are at their most beautiful" (*sab se sundar ke nāte khatarnāk*), and they too are in a state of danger (FREED and FREED 1980: 451; RAHEJA 1988a: 43). According to Sarasvati (1977: 188), every stage of the marriage rites is fraught with danger, and the bride is especially susceptible to the evil eye and evil spirits.<sup>9)</sup> In order to avert these dangers, the bride and groom constantly carry an iron object on their person, and they are not permitted to travel long distances alone. From the commencement of the marriage rites until they bathe on the day of the *byāh* rites, the bride and groom wear the same clothes every day and must take measures to ensure that they are not possessed by evil spirits.

Thus, during the course of these rites of passage, in addition to the concept of impurity, there is also a strong awareness of the dangers of evil spirits. In view of the fact that impurity is not to be observed in the case of marriage rites and the dangers emanating from evil spirits are to be found in all rites of passage, in order to gain an overall understanding of rites of passage it is necessary to consider them not only from the perspective of impurity, but also from the viewpoint of the dangers due to evil spirits.

## (2) *The Conception of Auspiciousness and Inauspiciousness in Rites of Passage*

It is believed that during rites of passage there operate dangerous forces that pose a threat to the rite, and the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are closely linked to this perception. The views of the inhabitants of the village where I conducted my investigations may be summarized as follows: any event or phenomenon that brings prosperity or happiness to one's family and lineage is auspicious, while any event or phenomenon that exerts a negative influence on the prosperity or happiness of one's family and lineage, such as an attack by an evil spirit, is inauspicious.<sup>10)</sup> In the previous section I pointed out that there is a danger of attacks from evil spirits during the course of rites of passage, but inauspiciousness may also result from other factors such as the movements of heavenly bodies.<sup>11)</sup> For example, because the birth of a child represents the birth of a new family member and is linked to the prosperity of the family and lineage, it is regarded as an auspicious event. But if the birth of a child should cause misfortune to befall the family on account of the position of the sun, moon or other heavenly bodies at the time of the child's birth, then it is looked upon as inauspicious (NARAYANAN 1985: 58). Marriage too is regarded as a most auspicious event since it leads to expansion of the lineage and prosperity for the family. But if the *paṇḍit* should chant the wrong *mantra* during the marriage rites or if the bride or groom should be possessed by an evil spirit, the marriage itself is said to bring misfortune and to become an inauspicious event. In other words, each rite has potential dangers that may become the cause of inauspiciousness, and it is therefore necessary to eliminate such inauspiciousness by taking preventive measures, making ritual

gifts (*dān*), or performing the rite by appropriate methods (RAHEJA 1988a: 162).

I shall now summarize some of the typical phenomena considered in S village to pertain to auspiciousness and inauspiciousness in rites of passage.<sup>12)</sup>

- (i) Firstly, as regards days of the week, Monday, Wednesday, Friday and Saturday are perceived as being auspicious, while Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday are thought to be inauspicious. If, for example, the sixth day (*chaṭhī*) in birth rites should fall on a Tuesday, the fingernails and toenails of the mother and child are not painted red. Again, if the day on which the *bāl banavānā* rite among the funeral rites is to be performed should happen to coincide with a Tuesday or Sunday, it will be postponed until the next day. Condolences are also not offered on Tuesdays or Sundays. In the case of marriage rites, Tuesdays, Thursdays and Sundays are avoided if at all possible.
- (ii) Among the points of the compass, east is regarded as auspicious and south as inauspicious. During the *byāh* rites among the marriage rites, the bride and groom sit facing east, while in the funeral rites the body of the deceased is placed with its head towards the south, and the chief mourner also faces south when performing various rites.
- (iii) Among the different colours, red and yellow are considered to be auspicious. During the course of the marriage rites, the bride and groom bathe daily and apply turmeric not only to themselves but also to the "marriage pole" and other implements used in the marriage rites. In addition, prior to the commencement of the *byāh* rites, their fingernails and toenails are painted red. Similarly, in the birth rites, the mother and child bathe on the sixth day and have their fingernails and toenails painted red, while in the funeral rites, when a wife has died before her husband, *sindūr* is applied to the head of the deceased and her fingernails and toenails are painted red.
- (iv) Among foodstuffs, *urd* beans, rice, barley, raw sugar and yoghurt are considered to be auspicious. In marriage rites barley and rice are used in various situations, being applied, for instance, to a ritual pot, and dishes using barley and rice are also prepared, while the bride and groom are given raw sugar and yoghurt to eat. On the day of the *bārahī* rite among the birth rites, dishes made with *urd* beans, rice and barley are eaten.
- (v) In marriage rites, uneven numbers, regarded as auspicious, are used in various situations, with, for example, five women performing different rites and an odd number of wooden parrots being attached to the "marriage pole."

There is thus a strong awareness of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness in rites of passage, coinciding as they do with important junctures in a person's life, such as birth, marriage and death, and by performing the rites in appropriate ways based on this clearly recognized conception of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, the participants both eliminate the dangers that may lead to inauspiciousness and also promote states of auspiciousness conducive to the future prosperity of their descendants.

**Table 4.** Caste Duties of Service Castes and their Roles in Rites of Passage.

Caste	Caste Duties/ Remuneration	Roles in Rites of Passage/ Remuneration
Brahman Caste <i>Paṇḍit</i>	Performance of <i>pūjās</i> at temples and homes of laity/Cereals (biannually)	Marriage rites: performs <i>kalyān pūjā</i> and presides over <i>byāh</i> /Cereals, multiples of 11 rupees Birth rites: selects time for bathing on 6th day and first outing and ties <i>jantal</i> around child's neck/ Cereals; takes meal at mother's home on 12th day/Meal Funeral rites: performs <i>pūjā</i> for <i>piṇḍa palnā</i> and receives <i>piṇḍas</i> as <i>dān</i> /Cereals; performs <i>pūjā</i> and takes meal on 13day/Meal
<i>Mahā pātra</i>	Selection of auspicious times/Several rupees or multiples of 11 rupees	Funeral rites: breaks <i>ghānt</i> during <i>bāl banavānā</i> /Bed, sari, cereals
Nāi Caste <i>Nāi</i> (male)	Haircuts/Cereals (biannually)	Marriage rites: helps <i>paṇḍit</i> during <i>byāh</i> /Cereals, eating utensils, multiples of 11 rupees Funeral rites: shaves chief mourner and male relatives/Cereals
<i>Naun</i> (female) [Cosmetician]		Marriage rites: directs women's rites and prepares ritual site; paints bride's and groom's nails red; attends on bride during <i>byāh</i> /Cereals, eating utensils, sari, multiples of 11 rupees Birth rites: paints mother's and child's nails red/Cereals, sari Funeral rites: prepares body; bathes female relatives during <i>bāl banavānā</i> and paints their nails red/Cereals
Camār Caste <i>Camār</i> (male)	Farm labour/Cereals (biannually)	Funeral rites: transports body on stretcher/Cereals
<i>Camārin</i> (female) [Midwife]	Farm labour/Cereals (biannually)	Birth rites: acts as midwife, attends on mother and baby for 6 days, and bathes them on 6th day/Cereals, sari, eating utensils
Dhobī Caste <i>Dhobī</i> (male)	Washing of clothes/Cereals (biannually)	Funeral rites: washes cloths of chief mourner and male relatives
<i>Dhobin</i> (female) [Washerwoman]	Washing of clothes/Cereals (biannually)	Birth rites: washes mother's clothes/Cereals, sari Funeral rites: washes clothes of female relatives/Cereals

## 2) Service Castes and Rites of Passage

Both Brahman priests such as the *paṇḍit* and *mahā pātra* and also lower castes such as the Camārs, Washermen (Dhobīs) and Barbers (Nāīs) are associated with conceptions of not only purity and impurity but also auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, and they play important roles in rites of passage. In Table 4 I have summarized the caste duties of these castes and their roles in rites of passage.

### (1) *The Paṇḍit and Mahā Pātra*

The *paṇḍit*, or professional priest, plays an important role in marriage rites. On the day of the *maṭmaṅgala* he performs the *kalyān pūjā* to pray for a successful consummation of the marriage and also ties cords for warding off evil spirits to the wrists of the bride and groom. On the occasion of the *byāh* rites, the *paṇḍits* of both parties participate and perform a series of rites in the course of which the bride and groom become wife and husband. During birth rites, the *paṇḍit* ties a talisman around the child's neck and selects an auspicious time of day for the mother and child to bathe on the sixth day and an auspicious day for them to leave the confinement room, thereby assisting them in returning to normal everyday life. In addition, on the occasion of the *bārahī* rite on the twelfth day he takes a meal at the mother's home, indicating that the mother and her relatives have now completed their return to everyday society.

In funeral rites, the *paṇḍit* performs a *pūjā* on the occasion of the *piṇḍa palnā* rite, and by accepting on behalf of the deceased a gift of *piṇḍas* made by the chief mourner, he removes all inauspiciousness from the chief mourner and other relatives of the deceased. He also performs a *pūjā* on the thirteenth day (*terahī*), and by partaking of a meal on behalf of the deceased, he satisfies the ancestral spirits and reinstates the relatives of the deceased to everyday society.

The *mahā pātra* is a priest who participates only in funeral rites. On the occasion of the *bāl banavānā* rite he performs a *pūjā* for the chief mourner, and by accepting *dān* as a gift for the deceased, he rids the chief mourner and other relatives of inauspiciousness. His chief role lies in breaking the *ghānt*, in which the spirit of the deceased is believed to reside. Because there is a possibility of being attacked by the spirit of the deceased, this is regarded as a dangerous task, and only a *mahā pātra* capable of countervailing this danger is said to be able to perform it. By breaking the *ghānt*, the *mahā pātra* takes it upon himself to suitably establish the deceased as an ancestral spirit and to bring the chief mourner and other relatives of the deceased from a state of danger back to everyday life.

In the caste hierarchy the *mahā pātra* is a Brahman and belongs to the highest caste. But the rite of breaking the *ghānt* takes place in the open space to the north of the village, and he does not go near the homes of the villagers. In everyday life too it is regarded as inauspicious to meet a *mahā pātra*, and people of the lower castes also try to avoid him.<sup>13)</sup>

Hitherto, when discussing the roles of priests in rites of passage, there has been

a tendency to emphasize aspects relating to the concepts of purity and impurity and the control of power as reflected in their officiation of rites addressed to the chief gods of Hinduism and their performance of rites of purification (HARPER 1964; TANAKA 1986). But insofar that they select suitable times and days for performing rites, protect people from evil spirits, receive *dān*, and remove inauspiciousness, the *paṇḍit* and *mahā pātra* are also closely associated with auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. Raheja (1988a: 37) states that it is possible to guard against the dangers attendant upon rites of passage and everyday life and against the resultant inauspiciousness by means of *dān*, and the typical recipient of such *dān* is the Brahman priest. As is epitomized by his name meaning "great vessel," the *mahā pātra* in particular, in his role as a recipient of *dān*, acts to remove inauspiciousness from the chief mourner and other relatives of the deceased.

## (2) *The Midwife, Washerwoman and Cosmetician*

Not only priests from the Brahman caste, but also members of lower service castes such as Barbers, Washermen and Camārs also play important roles in rites of passage, and it is the women rather than the men that are more actively involved in these rites.<sup>14</sup> Here, in accordance with the social roles that they assume in the course of these rites, I shall refer to the woman belonging to the Camār caste as the "midwife," to the woman belonging to the Washerman caste (*dhobin*) as the "washerwoman," and to the woman belonging to the Barber caste (*naun*) as the "cosmetician."

First, the midwife cuts the umbilical cord during the birth rites and attends to the needs of the mother and child during their period of confinement. Then, on the sixth day, she bathes the mother and child for the first time after the birth. *Dāī* (midwife), *dhobin* (washerwoman), *naun* (cosmeticians) and other members of the lower service castes have until now been considered to remove the impurity of the higher castes (HARPER 1964: 194–196). But the midwife is not regarded simply as someone who removes impurity. Women villagers refer to birth rites as "a task when it is dangerous to be in the confinement room" (*saur me rahar daibī ke kām karā*), and they look upon the midwife as a person capable of resisting the dangers emanating from evil spirits. It may therefore be assumed that the midwife does not merely remove impurity, and that by being with the mother and child for these six days she also fulfills the function of protecting them from attacks by evil spirits. At a funeral, Camār men will carry the body of the deceased on a stretcher, and they too may be considered to be protecting the body from attacks by evil spirits. In S village, when a pregnant woman feels unwell, her affliction is removed by giving *dān* to the midwife. Raheja (1988a: 94) reports a similar instance, and it may be said that the midwife serves to remove inauspiciousness from the mother and child.

Next, the washerwoman not only washes the mother's clothes on the occasion of birth rites, but also washes the clothes worn by female relatives of the deceased during funeral rites. Men of the Washerman caste similarly wash the clothes of male relatives, thereby removing their impurity. Because she handles polluted

clothes, the washerwoman has until now been looked upon as impure. But the supposedly impure washerwoman is allowed to participate in the rites performed by women during marriage rites. In everyday life too it is considered auspicious to encounter a washerwoman outdoors, even if she should be carrying soiled clothes, and there is thus a need to take account of her associations not only with impurity, but also with auspiciousness. Sarasvati (1977: 188) also points out links between the washerwoman and auspiciousness, reporting that in some regions the washerwoman is regarded, together with the *devadāsī*, as an eternally auspicious being and that she performs the *sindūr dān* rite on the occasion of a marriage.

During the marriage rites, the cosmetician prepares the ritual site by drawing auspicious patterns on the ground, gives directions for the rites performed by women, and generally fulfills a role similar to that of a priest. She also paints the fingernails and toenails of the bride and groom red and makes their faces up, while in birth rites she similarly paints the nails of the mother and child red on the first day that they go outside. In funeral rites, if the deceased is a woman who has died before her husband, she will apply *sindūr* to the body and paint the fingernails and toenails red, while if the deceased is a man, she will apply *tilak* to his forehead. During the *bāl banavānā* rite she will rub the female relatives with oil and paint their nails red. In addition, she remains in attendance on the bride when the bride and groom break earthen vessels with their left feet and also throughout the *byāh* rites.<sup>15</sup> A man of the Barber caste prepares the ritual site where the marriage rites are to be performed and also assists the *paṇḍit* in the course of the *byāh* rites. Meanwhile, in funeral rites he shaves and bathes the chief mourner on the occasion of the *piṇḍa palnā* rite and shaves the chief mourner and male relatives during the *bāl banavānā* rite, thereby removing their impurity.

Because she handles the like of hair and nail parings, the cosmetician has also been looked upon as impure (DAS 1986: 186–187). But in various rites of passage the assumedly impure cosmetician prepares the ritual site, which must be pure. In addition, she not only protects the different people involved in the rites, especially the chief participants, from evil spirits, but by painting their nails red, drawing auspicious patterns, and applying other forms of makeup, she restores the new mother and female relatives in mourning to their rightful places in society and mediates the entry of the newborn baby, the bride and groom, and the deceased into their respective new worlds.<sup>16</sup> Furthermore, the acceptance by the cosmetician of the money circled over the heads of the bride and groom during marriage rites and of money from relatives of the deceased on the occasion of funeral rites represents a type of *dān* and is related to the removal of inauspiciousness (RAHEJA 1988a: 87, 156).

Up until now emphasis has been placed on the fact that Brahmans are concerned with purification while the lower service castes remove the impurity of the higher castes. But Raheja and myself have pointed out that these service castes not only remove the impurity associated with various rites, but also fulfill the function of removing inauspiciousness from the participants by accepting *dān*.

This by itself, however, merely represents an emphasis of inauspiciousness in which impurity has been replaced by inauspiciousness, and it fails to go beyond the negative implications of these phenomena. In addition, however, the midwife, washerwoman and cosmetician not only protect the participants in these rites from attacks by evil spirits, but also play an active role in promoting auspiciousness through the application of makeup, and it is important to take these aspects into account as well.<sup>17)</sup>

In the above we have seen a reversal of values, with Brahmans, endowed with a high degree of purity, being associated with inauspiciousness and women of the lower service castes, regarded as impure, being associated with auspiciousness, and it may be said that these values do not mirror social standing within the hierarchy. Does this mean, then, that the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are not directly related to caste ideology? Or, as is suggested by Marglin (1985b: 80), does there exist an ideology and corresponding social relations distinct from the hierarchical ideology based on the pure/impure dichotomy? This is an important point, but since it is not my aim in this article to develop a theory of the caste system, I shall merely draw the reader's attention to these questions and return to them in the concluding section.

### 3) Women and Rites of Passage

#### (1) *Women's Rites and Songs*

Following on from the above discussion of the service castes, I now wish to consider the roles of women in general in rites of passage. Whereas the rites performed by priests are called "scriptural rites" (*śāstra acār*), those performed by the ordinary peoples are called "folk rites" (*lok acār*) or, in view of the fact that they are often performed by women, "married women's rites" (*śtrī acār*). In S village, they are also called "the work of married women" (*mehrāru kā kām*). There are relatively few instances in which men in general actively participate in rites of passage except when, as in the case of the bridegroom or chief mourner, they are one of the chief participants. By way of contrast, women have a close involvement in rites through their singing of songs and their performance of "the work of married women."

Firstly, with regard to the dangers associated with rites, it may be pointed out that women in general play an active role in the propitiation of evil spirits. For example, in several of the marriage rites women sing songs for summoning ancestors. The ancestors summoned on such occasions are those who have died unnatural deaths by, for example, drowning or being stung by a scorpion. People who have died prematurely as a result of accident or illness are believed to become evil spirits who then cause misfortune, and by inviting in advance such ancestors to the ritual site, they are prevented from exerting any harmful influence on the marriage rites.<sup>18)</sup>

Next, during the course of rites of passage women perform what might be described as disarticulative ritual actions related to physical expression, such as



group singing, dancing and wailing. During birth rites and marriage rites, women gather each night to sing songs, and this serves as an index of non-normality marking the beginning and end of the rite. Although they do not sing during funeral rites, female relatives instead shout the name of the deceased and wail loudly in sing song fashion every day for the first thirteen days after a death. This wailing (*syāpā*) also serves to mark the non-everyday nature of the rites (DAS 1986: 188). According to Inden and Nicholas (1977: 42), in Bengali marriage rites wailing by women is said to have the effect of driving away evil forces. Likewise, it may be assumed that in S village too the women's actions of singing or wailing in groups during rites serve to prevent attacks by evil spirits.

The songs sung by women during birth rites and marriage rites are called "auspicious songs" (*maṅgal gīt*), and in S village it is said that "women sing songs for the sake of auspiciousness" (*śubh ke nāte mehrāru kā gīt gāuat hai*), thus pointing to a connection between songs and auspiciousness. In particular, the songs sung by women during marriage rites contain sexual metaphors such as "pestle" and "stone stick," suggestive of a phallus. Women also imitate sexual acts in their dances and enact childbirth, and close links with reproduction and fertility may thus be seen in the songs and performances of women during rites of passage (YAGI 1990a: 76; 1990b: 198). It might also be noted that for each of the individual marriage rites a specific song is sung. In view of the fact that these rites cannot take place without the singing of songs, it is to be surmised that the women's songs play an important role in the successful performance of rites and have a thaumaturgical significance similar to that of the *mantra* chanted by the *paṇḍit* (YAGI 1990a: 74).

## (2) *Women and Auspiciousness*

The roles played by women in rites of passage are underpinned by the close links obtaining between women and conceptions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. Women actively participate in marriage rites, and it is married women who play the chief role on this occasion. Married women with a husband and children are referred to as *maṅgalanārī* or *sumāṅgalī*, both of which mean "auspicious woman." It will be recalled that married women are associated with fertility through their singing of songs and enacting of certain scenes. Widows (*raṇḍī* or *vidhvā*) and barren women (*bāmjhī* or *nirbance*), unable to beget children and contribute to the prosperity of the family, are regarded as inauspicious and are unable to participate actively in marriage rites. By way of contrast, "in funeral rites it is good for a widow to go in front" (*raṇḍī sudhari me pahere jānā acchā hai*), and funeral rites are performed with widows playing a leading role. Meanwhile, a menstruating woman (*rajasvālī* or *mahināvālī*) is regarded as impure because of the discharges of unclean blood, but she is also considered to be auspicious because she carries a "seed" linked to the family's prosperity. In previous discussions of purity and impurity, it has been maintained that menstruating women do not participate in rites because of their impurity (HARPER 1964: 161). They can, however, participate at least in marriage rites, which are regarded as pure, and this type of phenomenon

can only be understood by taking into account the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness.

In everyday life too it is considered auspicious and conducive to success if one encounters a pregnant woman (*garbhavati*) outdoors or when one is about to embark on a task. Such a woman is called "one who brings auspiciousness" (*sagunīhiya*). Meeting a widow or barren woman, on the other hand, is regarded as inauspicious, and such a woman is called "one who brings inauspiciousness" (*asagunīhiya*). Marglin has pointed out that the *devadāsī*, a special type of woman married to a god, is considered to be eternally auspicious, but through their links with procreative power and fertility ordinary women are also closely associated with auspiciousness.<sup>19)</sup>

According to the women of S village, "if likened to a tree, a girl is auspicious because she is the bud prior to flowering, a menstruating woman is auspicious because she represents the seed, a pregnant woman is auspicious because she has flowered and is bearing fruit, and a widow is inauspicious because she is past bearing fruit." Thus auspiciousness is not necessarily determined by whether or not a woman is married, and it is in relation to her procreative powers as represented by children that she is perceived to possess fertility and be auspicious. In S village, women endowed with this reproductive power are regarded as auspicious, thus suggesting a view of women different from the viewpoint hitherto that would regard women as being more impure than men on account of menstruation.<sup>20)</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSION

In the above, basing myself on a critique of previous discussions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness by Das, Marglin and Raheja, I have focussed on the attributes of people involved in different rites and have analyzed various concepts found in rites of passage and the roles of service castes in these rites. As a result, I have been able to point not only to the salience of the concepts of temporary auspiciousness and inauspiciousness in rites of passage, but also to the existence of permanent specialists related to these concepts. Moreover, insofar that there is no fixed correlation between purity and auspiciousness, with the pure Brahman being associated with inauspiciousness and women in general and women of the lower service castes, usually regarded as impure, participating in the rites as auspicious persons, it has become clear that these values are not directly related to social status within the hierarchy.

That being so, are conceptions of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness completely unrelated to caste status? For a consideration of this question, it is necessary to examine the way in which women of the higher castes involve themselves in the rites. It is to be surmised that they too are vested with a positive value as auspicious persons, but at issue here is the question of whether they too, like the lower-caste Yādav women of S village, actively perform rites, sing songs,

and imitate sexual acts in rites of passage.<sup>21)</sup>

There also remains the question of why women are so actively involved in these rites. This could be related to the ambivalent nature of women's reproductive powers, namely, their impurity and fecundity. In pure/impure theory, women have been regarded as impure beings because of menstruation. But when considered in light of the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, women, although characterized by impurity, are endowed with reproductive powers and are related to auspiciousness. Does this mean, then, that impurity is to be equated with auspiciousness? When one considers that men belonging to the service castes also fulfill the function of removing inauspiciousness, as do the women, but are not directly linked to auspiciousness, it would seem that impurity is not simply associated with auspiciousness, but that powers of fecundity, related to the prosperity of the family and lineage, are auspicious. It is presumably for this reason that women, both women at large and those belonging to the service castes, play such important roles in rites.<sup>22)</sup> Moreover, this auspiciousness of women is not an absolute attribute, but may change in the course of a woman's life-cycle. The concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness, unlike those of purity and impurity, do not represent a principle of exclusive opposition, but could be said to embody a variable principle.<sup>23)</sup>

Although we are left with these unresolved questions, in the above I have at least been able to show, I believe, that the rites of passage of the lower castes, as well as the roles of the service castes and women involved in these rites, cannot be understood only by means of the concepts of purity and impurity and that they assume a more positive significance when concepts such as auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are also taken into consideration. Although I have restricted myself to an analysis of rites of passage, I would like to regard this article as the first step towards a more comprehensive examination of the relationship between caste and gender.

#### NOTES ON TRANSLITERATION

For easier recognition I have used the standard Hindi spellings where possible, rather than Bhojpuri spellings except where no Hindi equivalent exists (see R.S. McGregor, *The Oxford Hindi-English Dictionary*).

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## NOTES

- 1) Here I use the term "service caste" in the sense of specialist groups such as priests, barbers, etc., who provide services for religious rites.
- 2) Srinivas (1952) was the first to differentiate between the concepts of pure (*maḍi*) and impure (*polé*) on the one hand and auspicious (*maṅgal*) and inauspicious (*amaṅgal*) on the other. He related *maḍi* and *polé* to social structure and *maṅgal* to rites of passage (especially marriage rites). Khare (1976), on the other hand, argued that purity was linked to the individual's religious quest while auspiciousness represented dominant Hindu culture. By way of contrast, Dumont (1980) maintained that the concepts of purity and impurity constituted the ideology lying at the base of Hindu society, and he regarded phenomena relating to authority (kingship and its successor, the land-owning dominant caste) as "non-ideological residuum" of no value. In doing so, he availed himself of the idea of "that which encompasses" and "that which is encompassed," arguing that authority is subsumed by and subservient to the religious pure/impure ideology. Raheja (1988a) has reviewed discussions of the Brahmans as related to purity and auspiciousness as related to kingship. See also TANABE 1990.
- 3) Among the castes dealt with in this article, the *paṇḍits* are considered to belong to the purest caste, followed by the Yādavs and Kahārs, then the Barbers and Washermen, and lastly the Camārs, who are regarded as the lowest caste.
- 4) Whereas the *paṇḍits* say that the god Gaṇeśa resides in this jar, the women villagers say that it is Śiva's consort Gaurī who dwells inside. It is at any rate regarded as a very auspicious object (MADAN 1985: 13).
- 5) In some regions a sacred fire is circled seven times, but this rite is not performed in S village.
- 6) This probably corresponds to tetanus.
- 7) The dangers emanating from evil spirits have been pointed out repeatedly by many researchers (BABB 1975; FREED and FREED 1980; KAUSHIK 1976; RAHEJA 1988a; SARASVATI 1977; SRINIVAS 1952).
- 8) On this point see FREED and FREED 1980: 51; STEVENSON 1971: 136, 191.
- 9) Marriage provides the occasion for two separate groups of people to come together, and because this produces tension, some sort of danger is thought to arise (FREED and FREED 1980: 451; RAHEJA 1988a: 43).
- 10) Madan (1985: 24) states that purity is an attribute of objects while auspiciousness refers primarily to events, and Tanabe (1990: 128) points out that auspiciousness is related to the happiness and prosperity of the cosmic whole. The villagers of S village relate the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness to events and phenomena, and they recognize them at a level pertaining to the individual's immediate everyday life rather than at any level relating to cosmic prosperity.

- 11) Raheja (1988a: 43) lists a number of additional negative influences that may become sources of inauspiciousness, including distress, disease, terror, sin, evil, faults and hindrances.
- 12) Auspiciousness and inauspiciousness are also recognized in the positions of the heavenly bodies when performing the individual rites of rites of passage. In everyday life too, the villagers recognize auspiciousness and inauspiciousness in various situations: for example, they will not apply *sindūr* on Tuesdays or Thursdays because these are regarded as inauspicious days, and it is considered auspicious to travel in a westerly direction on Mondays and Saturdays. For further details, see RAHEJA 1988a.
- 13) Parry (1980: 94) states that whereas it is auspicious to see a Sweeper woman, it is inauspicious to set eyes on a Mahā brahman (corresponding to our *mahā pātra*), and that although the latter belongs to a high caste, he is ultimately an inauspicious person. See also FULLER 1979.
- 14) Men belonging to the service castes have close connections with daily life, for Camār men work as farm labourers, men of the Barber caste cut hair, and men of the Washerman caste wash clothes. But it is the women of these castes who are more closely involved in rites of passage, acting as midwives, washerwomen and cosmeticians, and are associated with the concepts of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness. For more details, see Table 4.
- 15) On this point, see DAS and UBEROI 1971: 37; DAS 1982: 146.
- 16) Like masks and other bodily colouring, the makeup applied by the cosmetician during rites of passage may be considered to have a symbolic significance related to rebirth.
- 17) Das (1982: 146) states that the role of 'impure' castes such as the washerman in 'pure' rituals such as marriage is to protect the bride and groom from attacks by evil forces, but in addition one should also bear in mind their associations with auspiciousness.
- 18) In those marriage rites in which women play a central part, circumambulations are always in a counterclockwise direction, that is, with one's left side towards the object being circled. For example, in the rite for inviting ancestors, the four pots are circled counterclockwise, and the bride and groom also circle the well together with their mothers five times in a counterclockwise direction. Das (1982: 94) has shown that auspiciousness is related to life and the right-hand side of the body while inauspiciousness is related to death and the left-hand side of the body, but as is pointed out by Raheja (1988a: 144), counterclockwise circumambulations could be considered to be related to the removal of inauspiciousness.
- 19) The active participation by married women in rites and their associations with fertility are also to be observed in Bengal and south India; see INDEN and NICHOLAS 1977: 39-52; REYNOLDS 1980: 36-44; SARASVATI 1977: 187-188.
- 20) The question of fertility is connected to that of *śakti*, which is regarded as a supernatural force and the essence of the gods and, as the female principle, is also related to women's sexuality (TANAKA 1986:5). According to the women of S village, women perform *vrata* rites because they are endowed with *śakti*. There is a need to conduct further research on the relationship between auspiciousness and *śakti*. With regard to this question, see WADLEY 1975 and REYNOLDS 1980.
- 21) I am in the process of investigating the situation in the case of the higher castes, but it would appear that women of the higher castes also actively participate in rites, singing songs and imitating sexual acts. In view of the fact that Freed and Freed (1980) and Inden and Nicholas (1977) have also reported similar cases, it may be assumed that women play active roles in rites regardless of their caste status.
- 22) There is also scope to examine the question of whether, when considered in the context of

caste society as a whole, the fact that women of the lower service castes are involved in rites in a specialist capacity is, despite the emphasis placed on their auspiciousness, nothing more than an indication of their low status.

- 23) Marglin (1985b: 79–80) characterizes the opposition between the auspicious and the inauspicious as exemplifying a “transformative principle” to be seen, for instance, in the dynamism of the flow of time, processes of growth, maturation, and decay, and she contrasts it with the “hierarchical” principle governing purity and impurity.

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