

## CHAPTER 5

### Alternative medication practices

Alternative medicine is a rather vague term used loosely to distinguish ancient and culture-bound health care practices which existed before the application of science to health matters. Some frequently used synonyms are indigenous, unorthodox, folk, frings and unofficial healings.

Alternative medication practices have different meaning to different people. Some are inclined to include even ethnomedicine in it while others prefer to restrict, various practices excluding ethnomedicine under this category. Beside the supernatural healing practices, medications done without contacting modern/allopathic medical practitioners, like contacting drug retailers, over the counter sales, using private kit-boxes, consulting neighbours and various other self-use of drugs are some of the forms of alternative medication practices. Many of the alternative practices derive their legitimacy with reference to the super-natural realm, and are often resorted to before contacting the modern medical practitioners.

Medication practices have taken several forms in different parts of the globes. The history of modern medicine can be traced undoubtedly from remote past and also from the practices evolving gradually and indigeneously among various people not only from the west alone but also from the eastern societies. But one important differentiating factor has been the application of experimental logic to the modern science of medicine. The

therapeutic intricacies are examined and how exactly the medicine works and why have been sought to be unearthed. In alternative medication practices the whole channel of cause and effect relation is not sufficiently explicit, even though investigations are being conducted into some of them in recent times to reveal the inner relations, as in the case of, say, acupuncture, which has been one of the alternative medication practices evolving in China.

Acupuncture and moxibustion have been applied in China for the last 2000 years or so. The simplicity of their application, their minimum side-effects, and their low cost and rapid effect have made them to remain popular. It may be pointed out that some practitioners of acupuncture still adhere strictly to traditional Chinese medical theory, while others use it empirically, without reference to the indigeneous Chinese belief, and strictly in accordance with western style diagnosis and concepts of pathophysiology. Internationally there is a diversity of opinions regarding the techniques of acupuncture, the pre-requisite qualification of an acupuncturist, the usefulness of the notion of channels, and the specificity of acupuncture points.

Acupuncture, Unani or Chandsi medication (indigeneous to eastern Bengal), like many other recent ones such as homeopathy, have made their inroads into Nepal through diffusion of culture. But, here, in this account of the alternative medication practices in Nepal, such items are not included because they are external influences and also because they are by and large urban-centered even now.

## 5.1 The Faith Healers

Alternative medication practices in Nepal is a distillation of Nepalese culture and also acculturation through a long and slow process of history.

"My country is a flower garden of four castes and thirty six shades" late king Prithivi Narayan shah, the founder of Nepal pointed out the diversity of the people comprising the new nation over which he had come to reign in these words. Even today, there are such wide differences in the beliefs and practices of the various castes and tribes within Nepal that any attempt to generalize must be hedged with caution. Those interested in more detail in this regard are recommended to go through the papers presented in volume three of the Journal of Institute of Nepal and Asian studies. <sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, it is environment and social evolution that are responsible for the differences between the various health care systems and practices now in existence. The fundamental concepts regarding health and sickness are based on the idea of balances and imbalances between the component parts of the organism, and between those components and elements of nature such as earth, water, air, fire, metals, and heavenly bodies. Each element is capable of exerting a specific influence on certain organs. Thus, from birth to death, it is subjected to the control of elements of nature, including heavenly bodies, and survival depends on the

capacity to establish equilibrium in an environment containing both favourable and unfavourable elements. A knowledge of these elements can give the power to preserve or disturb the equilibrium that represents health.

The all-embracing outlook of alternative medication practices cannot be dissociated from religious concepts and the knowledge possessed by traditional healers of the causes, classification, diagnosis and treatment of diseases.

In Nepal, as in the rest of the world, there are doubts about the creation of universe, but credit for creation is frequently given to a supernatural power, to gods and goddesses. Most people at times of trouble turn to the gods for help. Blessing from the gods is always sought before commencing any new ventures. The concept of "atma" (spirit or soul) is also important in understanding the health care practices in the communities of Nepal. If the "atma" is disturbed, the system will be in disequilibrium with possible mental or physical stresses and strains. Nepalese always say that success and failure, good and bad, etc, depend not only on one's own effort, investment and labour, but also on one's "luck". Most people in Nepal believe that good emanates from the gods, and problems or sorrow come to them through wrath of gods if they have been disrespected or through evil spirits or one's own misdeeds. Gods are not normally "red in tooth and claw", for they are also seen as saviours and creators of the universe. To solve human needs and problems the gods have several alternatives. One of the

most important alternative is to empower a few chosen persons through dreams to help cure sickness and diseases. So, for example, Dhamis and Jhankris (Shaman-healers) are perceived people chosen by the gods to save and nourish their creation. These healers play a vital role in maintaining good health in the various communities, viewing illness as having a spiritual cause.

Prayag Raj Sharma in his study of the divinities in Western Nepal <sup>2</sup> has found that there are some striking features in the religious practices of the people. The leading divinities in the Karnali basin resolve themselves into five classes. In the first category come the Mastos who are 16 in number (in the region where he carried out his study). He has not however mentioned that the name and number of such Masto divinities may vary because, in fact, they are the clan deities, and every family would know what Masto is its Kul devata (clan deity), or benefactor to whom references may be made if there is any cause of distress. In the second category are included a number of divinities whose names do not bear the Masto suffix, but who nevertheless wield considerable power and prestige. In the third category fall the deified spirits. In the fourth category comes the female goddesses, and in the last are included Chandan Nath and Bhairav Nath, who wield much influence upon the fate of the females in particular. Sharma has mentioned that most of the leading divinities manifest themselves through a human medium, the oracle, who in the

local parlance, is called the Dhami. The institution of Dhami is based on the principle of reincarnation. When an old Dhami dies, the vacated position is filled up, after a certain time, by another person of the same family or clan group in whom the divinity chooses to reappear (autinu).

Here we might mention that the term shaman, in the literature, is generally applied to an individual who resembles the priest but who achieves his status primarily through 'possession', 'ecstasy' or the 'trance' and who is capable of 'soul journey' or 'magical flight'. Empirically this is seldom, if ever, the case. We are able to distinguish the shaman from other kinds of religious practitioners on the basis of time and space. Shamans differ primarily from oracle mediums or reincarnate Lamas in that they are not confined to a sacred space or an institution such as a temple or monastery. Spirit possession has been defined by Hitchcock as an "altered state of consciousness on the part of an individual as a result of what is perceived or believed to be the incorporation of an alien form with vital and spiritual attributes, e.g. the spirit of a superhuman form such as a witch, sorcerer, god, goddess, or other religious divinity"<sup>3</sup> Tibetan Buddhism described it as 'altered state consciousness' through his incorporation of an 'alien form', and also 'living metaphor' of spirit possession.

There is thus a "close relationship between spirit possession as an altered form of consciousness and parapsychology of western European conceptualization".<sup>3</sup>

Hitchcock presents that four types of spirit possession in the Nepal Himalaya can be distinguished on the basis of time and scope-reincarnate possession, tutelary possession, oracular possession and peripheral possession.

		Space	
		Undesignated	Designated
Time	undesignated	Peripheral possession	Reincarnate possession
	designated	Tutelary possession	Oracular possession

Throughout Nepal, spirit possession is cited as a source of discontent as well as a means for resolving discontent. Illness and misfortune are attributed to a variety of supernatural forces such as attacks by witches, sorcerers, forest divinities, spirits of deceased individuals and angry gods or goddesses. People frequently recognize that human neglect is usually at the basis for supernatural discontent. The system of cause, effect and cure is a circular and enclosed system of knowledge, and the cure is controlled spirit possession.

Hitchcock is of the view that "spirit possession in general occurs more frequently among those categories of people who are denied social statuses and traditional means

for social advancement in Nepal society .... similarly, men of lower castes, or men without lands, titles or positions of authority seem more inclined to spirit possession than those of higher castes, with wealth and social position. Spirit possession again provides an approved means for 'social protest'.<sup>3</sup>

The shaman is the person who treats the patients as well, whenever the need for doing so arises. Since he is a "person who at his will can enter into a nonordinary psychic state in order to make contact with the spirit world on behalf of members of his community", he is highly helpful in taking care of human afflictions of both mind and body.

Hitchcock has referred to a song of the Shamans in Nepal.<sup>4</sup> that is sung during various rituals during a seance. Of all the songs, it is the most frequently sung, partly because it legitimizes the Shaman's transcendental persona, but also because it is necessary to rid the client of witch-evil, a most common source of miseries in human life. The story tells of happenings in the First Age of the world's present era. Nine witch sisters, the gift of God to an aging childless couple, have grown up and have begun to do evil. For help, the king calls Rama, the first Shaman. Despite the song's having strong erotic overtones, the Shaman's power against evil is substantiated.

Recourse to Shamans, that is, the Dhamis and Jhankris,

is a common practice everywhere and with all communities in Nepal. One of the smallest groups among the Tibeto-Burman speaking population of Nepal are the chantels of the Dhaulagiri zone. Of them, Wolf Michl wrote <sup>5</sup> that they claim to be Hindus but they are much less influenced by Hinduism than even the northern Magars. They pretended to employ Brahmans for every important life cycle ceremony but, in fact, they did not do so. Among the deities worshipped by the Chantal only a few belong to classic Hindu pantheon, the most important, however, being the local deities, like Bhume, Bara and Siddha. Witches (bokshi, dayani), goblin or demon-like beings (bir, masan), and spirits of dead (moc, pret, sivo) play a dominant role in the religious beliefs and observances of the Chantels. And, the Jhankri is the most important religious expert among them. In one village inhabited by the Chantels, Michl found four Jhankris including one Jharini (woman shaman). The Jhankris belonging to the Kami community were the more numerous in the area, but it was not possible to obtain their precise number.

The various appellations by which Shamans are called in Nepal vary from community to community, and also there are subtle differences in the practices of some of them. Such appellations are as follows: Dhami, jhankri, Lama, Gubhaju, Fedangwa and Bijuwa. In ordinary parlance, a combined term such as Dhami-Jhankri or Fedangwa-Bijuwa is used. But Fedangwa is a Shaman from the Limbu community whereas Bijuwa is from the Rai community. The Rais and Limbus are very

close to each other, and they both belong to the Kiranti group of people in the eastern region. This may be one of the reason, apart from the fact their practices are almost similar, as to why they are commonly clubbed together without creating on the part of anyone any confusion. The Gubhaju are Newars, and it must be noted that Gubhaju is used for shamans priests as also some others. Contextually their role and functions will differ. But there are some interesting differences between the Dhami and the Jhankris. Most important of all, the Dhamis belong to the Brahmin, Jaisi or Chhetri caste groups, that is, to the twice-born families in the Nepali social order. The Dhamis invoke the Mastos or Kula devta/Devi, whereas the ihankris, who do not belong to the twice-born categories, will invoke Masan, Sikari, that is, the evil spirits or ghost-like creatures, from whom they derive their power. The Jhankris generally put on white gown which the Dhamis despise. Also, in the ritual practices associated with healing, the Jhankris usually make much use of liquor or animal-sacrifice that are completely absent in the case of Dhamis.

Be whatever it may, the employment of Dhami-Jhankris for the purposes of treatment of diseases is a fairly common phenomenon among all communities -high or low, rich or poor. About the other details of their healing practices, we shall shortly refer to them. But before we do so, it must be noted that with increasing sophistication of the society or the growing sankritisation of the people, the institution of

Dhami-Jhankris is looked upon with some suspicion. One should not hasten to assume that it is a recent happening only consequent of the introduction of modern western medicine alone. In fact, it appears that despite the practice being universal, efforts have been there even in the past to rid it of its mystical aura and prove that much of it may be just useless and without basis. From the folk-tales of Nepal, compiled by Kesar Lall <sup>6</sup>, we find an interesting story of confrontation between a Jhankri and a Lama (Gumba-Lama, to be precise) who was well versed in scriptures and books. In the story, the Jhankri could not reach the heavens with the help of his incantations and magic while the Lama could achieve the same. The Jhankri was asked by the Lama when he went for pilgrimage to India to look after the welfare of the people in his absence. But on his return he came to know that the Jhankri was conducting the affair without the help of any book. When he challenged the Jhankri to prove the efficacy of his magic, the Jhankri failed to reach the heavens, and, obviously, submitted before the grand Lama for wise counsel.

It is clear from the above story that efforts were on since a long time to subdue shamanism and establish the superiority of the scriptures and knowledge derived from books. But the tradition has nonetheless persisted, and we shall revert to them to get a fair idea of the most prevalent alternative medication practices in Nepal.

## 5.2 Diagnostics

As defined previously, alternative medicine is a rather vague term used loosely to distinguish ancient and culture-bound health care practices, and this also applies to the situation prevailing in the MP cluster, because it means different things to different people in the cluster. It varies among the providers, among the consumers and also between the providers and consumers. Some providers and consumers are of the view that alternative medications are only those which they practised without the consultation of duly qualified medical practitioners. Some of them believed that this medication was supposed to include buying allopathic medicines either from drug retailers, or over the counter sale or using private kit-boxes, or consulting their neighbours, and various other use of drugs, including ethnomedicine. But, in general, they believed on supernatural powers causing ill health - and often resorted to such means so as to combat them before contacting the allopathic medical insitutions.

The people, in the MP cluster were found to be generally ignorant about the Germ Theory and believed in diseases occuring due to a wide variety of factors connected with natural environment and supernatural influences. They felt that harmful effects may be due to the temperature of food, hot (garmi) or cold (sardi). Hot food caused tiredness, discomfort and headache while cold food caused swelling of the body (jieusunieko) or bloating of the

abdomen (petdhadincha). Food were also regarded as being susceptible to be contaminated by a witch (boksi). A few diseases were also ascribed to natural causes in the MP cluster. As for example, it is believed that one gets gonorrhoea by drinking hot water and going out in the sun which causes fever and other associated troubles. It also occurs by stepping over a place where somebody has urinated, and also by sexual contact with a woman in her menses. Syphilis lives in a woman's vagina and one gets it by contacting sex with her. But it might also be caused by eating hot things and by drinking too much alcohol. Headache, diarrhoea, and cough are also considered nature caused diseases.

Except for a few diseases, all the rest were believed to be caused by supernatural powers, spirits, or gods and goddesses, witches (personalistic agents): who one called as Lago spirits. If somebody falls sick seriously or suddenly, or when a disease takes a sudden bad turn, or when it involves a derangement of the mental faculties, it is considered to be due to the influences of the supernatural powers.

Before explaining the function of the supernatural powers or the causation of diseases, the methods of diagnosis adopted by shaman curers/traditional healers are important to observe. While healing practices are somewhat different for separate and specific diseases on the bases of cause of the disease, and situation and social environment

of the diseased person, the diagnoses pattern appears to be considerably similar. For making such diagnoses, there were a number of diagnostic procedures available with each ethnic groups which, though they differ in detail, had some basic similarities.

Just as it is important for a modern doctor to know the cause of abdominal pain - whether it was due to worm infestation, gastroenteritis or indigestion - similarly, it was important to know whether a particular disease of a patient in the cluster was due to the wrath of god and goddess, the work of an evil spirit, sorcery, witchcraft or the breach of taboo. Once this had been found out to obtain a cure was a matter of rituals, sacrifices, incantations, and other practices.

In this regard the alternative medication practices observed by the people in the MP cluster was completely rational in as much as it tried to bring about a cure by removing the basic causes which was different from that of other modern practices.

Various methods, singly, or in combination, according to the judgement of the practitioner were used for making a diagnosis. They include: questioning about the symptoms and diet, the casting of a horoscope, examination of the pulse (nari herney), examination of rice grains (ankat herney), etc.

Beginning with a history of the present illness, the curers elicit information from the patient through interrogation. He asks patients in order to find out whether he had by intention or otherwise broken a taboo, or had been disrespectful to the local gods/goddesses, or had not cared about the provided for the ancestral spirits, or if he had noticed any strange object in his surroundings, or had had a quarrel with a neighbour, wife, father or son, or he otherwise suspects somebody who could have intended him harm or illness. Also, the curer asks the patient about his dreams; he interrogates other family members of the patient's family to find out what they think about the probable cause of the illness; he looks for omens. And then he examines the pulse of the patient. All these, the curer does to find out the probable causes of illness. He invokes the spirits who might have been aggrieved and so have caused that illness. He requests by name the different spirits to reveal themselves and also indicate their demands. He requests his tutelary in the other world to find out the truth and reveal it to him, which the spirit does either directly to him, or else the message may be conveyed to the curer in a trance when the spirit speaks through his mouth.

But in spite of all of these, if the curer finds no clue, or if he finds a clue but wants further confirmation of it taking help from his laboratory procedures, then he resorts to different methods of divination. The commonest material used for which are rice, leaves of different trees,

wick lamp, reeds, etc. He lights a wick lamp (bati balney, divo balney) and places it in a plate which is half filled with rice and a coin. He provides incense, and then he holds the green leaves in the flame of the lamp and recites names. The answer is given by the grain of rice turning black and sticking to the leaf, or by the way of leaf curves in the heat. He proceeds gradually by narrowing the field of possibility beginning by taking names of gods, ancestors, sorcerers, etc. If any name is indicated, he takes the name of possible villages, wards, names of the individuals who may be the cause of illness/sickness of his client. After the investigation is over, he starts the treatment.

There are so many 'secrets' behind ill health and diseases that sometimes end up in death that much effort has to be made to know of them. Among the 'secrets' divination claims to reveal is the origin of disease; and among the things it claims to see in the future is the course of disease and its prognosis. Divination has actually been used for the diagnosis and prognosis of diseases and for deciding upon the most effective remedies for treating it. And it is an instrument which has, in a culturally homogeneous society, i.e., the MP cluster, the secondary therapeutic effect of making the patient feel that the unseen world is supporting the therapist and is actively involved with him in the treatment.

Healers in the cluster use a number of cowrie shells, some of them marked with copper ring, which are washed in water, and then shaken between the hands and thrown upon the ground; from the way in which they fall the therapist learns the origin of the diseases, the procedures required for its treatment and the prognosis.

### 5.3 Causation and Treatment

Causewise, the diseases may be ascribed to the following categories:

1. Wrath of Gods and Goddesses including unfavourable planetary effects;
2. Evil spirits;
3. Sorcery;
4. Witchcraft and Evil eye; and
5. Breach of Taboos.

In the following paragraphs, we propose to present a brief account of each of these categories based on our observations in the MP cluster.

5.3.1 Wrath of Gods and Goddesses including unfavourable planetary effects: There are various Gods and Goddesses in the cluster some of them bearing various local names. The major cause of their attack is their anger arising out of not receiving due recognition and reverences. In their

wrath, they cause various sickness or diseases or even, sometimes, they cause death for individuals.

The earth gods (bhume) and water gods (nag) attack individuals if their abode is disturbed or polluted. The higher gods, i.e. the temple gods, clan gods (kuldevata) and ancestor spirits (bavu) seem to cause trouble only if denied their proper worship. Some of the evil spirits of the bhut-pret category may be placated by being elevated in their status and worshipped as bavu by the clan (Kul, Guthi).

The gods are appeased by both shaman healers and astrologer priests. Shaman-curiers appeased the gods by ritual feeding, often accompanied by spells (mantra) and sometimes trances. Akchetta is a consecrated rice placed in the beams of a house with a promise to a god to perform a more regular ritual or feeding at a later date. In a ritual plate is placed rice and other grains, a piece of cloth, a small statue (murti), a small wick lamp, and some water. The curier encircles the plate about the patient's head and entreats the gods to cease from punishing the patient. But an astrologer or priest appease them by appropriate worship (puja).

There are two types of Astrologers, one who is professional Astrologer and the other is the priest. Both have knowledge of the formulations and combinations of the influences shed by 12 zodiacs, 27 stars and 9 planets

including their presiding deities. Examining the horoscope they calculate the effect of these gods of zodiacs, stars and planets on men. They examine the situation of the relationship between the various celestial bodies and human beings. Astrology supports and runs parallel to the doctrines as postulated by Ayurveda.

The people in the MP cluster believed that various celestial bodies exert varying degrees of influences on individuals depending upon the position of the planet at the time of their birth and its subsequent placement at different periods of their life.

Astrologers usually explain their knowledge and experiences about the functions of the planets. The moon rules the mind, the Sun controls the soul and Mercury influences the nervous system. Afflictions by the Moon and Mercury, and Mars or Saturn generally indicate mental disorders. Planetary positions also have an important effect on the periodicity of epidemics of Malaria, Influenza, etc.

The astrologer makes a realistic assessment of the personality of man, his physical and mental characteristics, his strengths and weaknesses, and the influences exerted over him by various planets at any given time. Thus, it is possible to make reasonable predictions about the diseases, sufferings and problems even sometimes before its occurrence.

Astrologers themselves do not perform Puja at the clients' households. They prescribe the method of Puja (workships) and also they identify the planets and Gods for whose propitiation the Puja has to be done. Choosing priests for the referred workship is done by the clients themselves. Astrologer only refers specific methods for specific planets or gods by which the user can strive to lessen the adverse effects if not altogether ward off the illness. They also recommend the use of Jap or mantras (wisdom spell) by the priest or the clients themselves. Sometimes ceremonial reading of Puranas (religious epics) is also prescribed. It is believed that if Puranas are read with devotion, then evil will not befall and the person can reasonably expect to live peacefully and in good health for a fixed duration of time. The astrologer can also help his client to decide about the time and direction of journey, or the place and timing for house construction and house-entry so that health and happiness prevail. Thus, various usages are there which can be classed as preventive measures or prophylactic.

Not only the gods, the goddesses also play a very important role in the maintenance of health. There are various therapy methods to appease them. The goddesses (devis) who have to be worshipped to ward off evils are held to be different manifestations of the goddess Kali or Durga. They include the small pox goddess (Ajima, Sitala Mai), and her various sisters who have a special relation to measles,

cholera, etc. The goddess of sky (Akash devi) may allow her shadow to fall on children and cause harm.

An example can be taken of the causation of smallpox by Sitalamai - or Devi, one of the seven sisters, who are said to produce various postular diseases/sickness/illness. To be free from these problems, Sitalamai is worshipped by the people of the MP cluster. If worshipped, she may not let loose smallpox, a disfiguring and deadly disease. The worship is made by providing various objects such as, providing a black pig, chickens, coconut, incense; the ears of buffalo, the tongue of a horse, goat, rosary, bangles and clothes to tie around her head (Feta).

The people of the cluster are of the view that Sitalamai causes the children to be stillborn, so that she must be given a speckled she-goat with rosary, black bangles and Feta. She obstructs delivery and thus kills both child and the mother; to prevent this, she must be given chickens. She gives children epileptic fits; and therefore she must be propitiated by offering her a black chicken and coconut. she also drives man mad. To ensure that she does not do so, she must be offered five differently coloured chickens, spotted goat and ornaments. She causes ague, and a coconut is due for it. She cripples the hands and feet with rheumatism; for this, she should be given chickens, a young pig, coconuts and liquor. She causes sudden pains in the chest, and, for it, she may be offered a black chicken and coconut. For

itches with large sores, chickens should be offered; if mumps, black she-goat is preferred. She visits young men in their sleep and robs them of their manhood; she must be given a chicken with a black bangle and red saree. She startles people and makes them ill with fright; so she must be offered a black chicken. Cattles get dysentery; if so, a goat and a pig must be offered.

The gods and goddesses that bring diseases, death and destruction among human beings, are portrayed among all communities as very touchy, liable to get into a rage soon, and are appeased only when appropriate offerings and sacrificies are made with due reverence and recognition.

5.3.2. Evil Spirits: The spirits of those who have died violent or otherwise inauspicious deaths or for whom death rites have not been properly performed turn evil. Interesting myths prevail among the people in the MP cluster about the origin of some of these spirits. The person who, after his death, was accorded no death rites, awakens being a ghost after 13 days of his death. He goes into the head of any person who stands in front of his way and make him fall down. When he falls down he becomes senseless throwing his legs and hands about as if he is a fowl. When this happens they call Jhankri for the removal of the problem. The Jhankri examines the patient and performs mostly blood sacrifices of either a chicken or pigeon. Only then the spirit leaves the patient and normalcy returns.

People in the MP cluster believe in the existence of a large number of bhut-prets which cause various diseases. Among the various spirits, the most dangerous spirits belong mostly to eleven types. They are: Bhut (the spirit of the dead assuming human form at will); Pret (the dead man's spirit in its invisible form); Pisatha (makes ugly notes of crying and accosts people on the way); Sakini (evil spirit, especially of a pregnant woman); Dakini (female spirit that spares the pregnant and menstruating woman); Daini (female spirit fond of casting its spell upon young and also newly married woman); Sikari (36 different kinds of non-descript evil spirit haunting people anywhere and anytime); Vavu (the spirit of the deceased ancestors generally benevolent but sometimes malevolent if the descendants violate the traditional rites); Desana (wandering spirits from far-away places that solicit services of village people); Masana (a strong and powerful spirit, that can cause bleeding, or other severe diseases); and Dehi (female spirit, powerful like Masana).

Most of the above spirits are propitiated with a goat, chicken, pigeon, pig and other animals.

A bhut comes into being from those that die in an unusual way by violence, accident, suicide, etc; or those who have been robbers, and notorious in their life-time for cruelty and violence. He is sure to become a bhut as

powerful and malignant as he was in life. They are represented in popular myths as having curious shapes, colour and proposition, sometimes having the form of animals that frighten people and vanishes in a flame of fire; sometimes they remain invisible, and frighten the people by speaking only in whispers. As a rule, they are helpless during the day, and move around in the night. They may cause any type of grievous injuries and sicknesses in persons who fall a prey to them. Only a Jhankri can ward-off the Bhut from the body with the aid of mantras and offerings. Most of the offerings consist of blood sacrifices, iron material, cloth, lamp, rice-grains, vegetables and the statuette (murti) of an imaginary person.

The strongest spirit is the Masana who have different names and status. Bir Masana is the head of the Masanas in the world of spirits. The usual supernatural causes of disease is the annoyance or displeasure of some Masanas or evil spirits who possess or catch hold of the person and trouble him continuously unless they are propitiated. There are many Masanas, three of whom are described here:

- (a) Dudh Masana is said to be a spirit without head, who generally creates troubles for the children. The child falls sick, his eyes get closed, but when a small piece of iron, a coconut and jaggery are offered, it generally leaves the child free.

- (b) Ragat Masana is said to cause bleeding from the mouth, the rectum and the uro-genital tract. Coconut, small piece of iron, and sweets are offered in appeasement.
- (c) Sul Masana causes shooting pains in the back and sides. Coconut, iron and jaggery are offered to control their anger.

5.3.3. Sorcery: The people in the cluster fear the magic (jadu) of enemy as much as they fear the evil spirits. An enemy, be it a neighbour or a relative, through magic of his own or with the help of a sorcerer, can bring disease and destruction upon another. If the condition remains undiagnosed and untreated, it can lead to death.

A sorcerer can apply both imitative and contagious magic to cause sickness.

Under the imitative magic, people in the cluster believed that the sorcerer may bring sickness or injury to a person drawing a small image or constructing a puppet that represents the victim. This image/puppet is then transfixed with arrows, burned or otherwise ill-treated, accompanied by suitable incantations; such measures are supposed to cause the person, against whom they are directed, to fall ill.

In the case of contagious magic the sorcerer obtains something of the victims body such as nail, hair,

excrements, cloths, food or the earth over which he has stepped. He utters incantations over these objects and the person is at once attacked with disease.

The sorcerer sometimes carries with him a rag bundle containing what are known as Khatra (destructive and harmful) agencies containing human hair, nail, claws, fragments of bones etc. Desiring to harm a person, he mixes the element of Khatra with such a food over which he pronounces spells. The bit of nail or bone or hair that is treacherously fed is believed to grow by degrees inside the victim's stomach finally killing him, unless some other sorcerer (jaduwala) is called in time to counteract the power of the Khatra agencies/objects.

5.3.4. Witchcraft and Evil eye: If a man is killed by a tiger or bitten by a snake, or a cat, or if a mother cannot deliver a child, if a boy's limbs wither and he goes lame, the people from the MP cluster may presume these to be the handiwork of some witches (boksi) around. Needless to say, such witches are generally female.

A Nepalese (of any caste or ethnicity) witch may injure her victim in many different ways: She may affect him directly and immediately by the power of her eye; she may destroy him by a curse; she may invoke the aid of the spirit with whom she has contacts to bring disease to her adversary; she may send a snake to bite him or a tiger or

cat to kill him; she may herself come by night and drink his blood; she may send her magic flying (baan) through the air on a leaf, or a bat.

People believe that witchcraft is learned either from persons who themselves practice witchcraft or it is learned in dreams. In most cases, it is the mother who herself a witch, instructs her daughter in the secrets of witchcraft and teaches her the powerful spells which give her power over some spirit. This spirit then serves the within her evil designs. The power of them is not inborn but acquired.

It is also believed that a witch makes use of a variety of procedures, including those adopted ordinarily by the sorcerers. If she wishes to kill a person, the witch shoots an arrow (baan) at an effigy of the man or at his shadow. The man thus shot at does not die suddenly; he develops consumption which is believed to cause holes in the lungs and leads to a slow but certain death. Or else, the witch makes an effigy of the person she wishes to harm, with powdered rice or wheat flour, and then pricks it with thorns. The victim suffers similar pricks resulting from boils and ulcers all over the body.

It is also believed that some individuals have the faculty to cast a spell on others by just looking at their faces, forehead, palm, or the body in general. some do it involuntarily at whosoever comes in their path, others do it

intentionally because they are jealous of other and desire to possess what others have. These individuals are known to be either very ugly or very beautiful and as they cast the evil eye, the person faces misfortune. The person may fall ill or, more often, have an accident. Children are believed to be particularly susceptible to the effect of the evil eye. People in the MP cluster do not like it if one admires their children's beauty or strength, for they suspect that such expressions of admiration are prompted by envy or jealousy.

5.3.5. Breach of Taboos: All taboos are believed, in the MP cluster, to be in the name, and under the sanction, of a fetish spirit, ghost, or deity. And, it is he who punishes the violator.

There are some common taboos among the people in the cluster. The taboo to sit on the barren earth is made for the protection from the affliction with sores. It is taboo among them to point a finger at the rainbow; should they do so the offending finger will get maimed or curved. Ophthalmic sufferers must not comb hair so that they may get relief from eye pain. Bathing in first rain causes ophthalmia and mumps; eating on a bamboo plate (Nanglo) causes abdominal pain, spitting on the earth creates sores in the mouth; those who burn pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) tree suffer from sores in their body. Urinating in water is a taboo to protect from the urinary tract infections; eating edibles

before the Puja (worship) is performed brings abdominal pain. And the several other taboos, the breach of which is always associated with problems.

It will be of some interest to present below a list of cultural beliefs and practices associated with pregnancy, childbirth and specific childhood diseases and common problems.

### Pregnancy

1. In order to ward off evil spirits and to bring on a safe and good birth, a pregnant woman wears a protective band around her neck (buti jantar). On it she has some special local herbal medicine (often made of whatever roots are available in the jungle) wrapped in some cloth.
2. A pregnant woman is never allowed to cross a river by herself. In order to protect her from the river's evil spirit called sishe a friend must always be with her.
3. During his wife's pregnancy, a husband is not allowed to slaughter an animal himself. In some places this is said to be because the baby in the mother's womb would be cut and would die.

4. In order to keep a pregnant woman healthy she will be fed goat's (uncastrated) blood.
5. A pregnant woman is not usually fed hot spicy foods, because it is believed that these would burn her baby.
6. If a child's father dies while it is still in the womb, the child is said to be unlucky: cursed for life.
7. If a pregnant woman does heavy work during her pregnancy, the child will be born early.

#### Child birth

A local sudeni is called for childbirth. She is usually an experienced old woman of low caste, and is often paid to stay with the new mother for 15 days to 1-2 months to care for her and her new baby. She will help deliver the baby, cut the cord, bathe the baby, and then continue to help the new mother and child.

1. If the placenta is retained, the mother will be fed khuba (butter and rice powder boiled in milk). If that is not successful in forcing the placenta out, the mother is often fed large amounts of her own hair, any available dirty rags, or even a pair of old shoes to induce vomiting. This, it is

believed, will cause pressure in the womb and the placenta will be forced out.

2. If the stars are not auspicious at the time of the child's birth, the sudeni will not remove the placenta or cut the umbilical cord. She will wait until the astrologer-priest advises that the stars are in an auspicious position.
3. After the umbilical cord is cut (leaving 4-5 inches which falls off itself), it is often buried under the fireplace. It is said this will cause the child to always come in time for its food.
4. If the part of the umbilical cord which dries and falls off itself is buried under a resting place on the road, the child will become a political leader, it is believed.
5. A new mother is cared for in very special ways. She and her new baby sleep in a separate room, usually very dark due to the lack of windows. It is believed that no cool air should be allowed to pass through their bodies (hawa lagne). However it is very normal for the new mother and child to sit in the sun each day and be bathed in hot mustard oil "often cooked with methi (*Trigonella fonnum*) a spice used in curry. This continues for at least nine days.

6. The new mother is not to do any difficult work for 1-3 months according to the ethnic group and economic situation. It is not until the 15th or 22nd day after giving birth that others may drink water from the hand of the new mother. During these first days, they are forbidden even to touch the new mother.
7. A boundary line of ashes is made around the bed of the new mother - this is to ward off evil spirits and witches from entering their bodies.
8. For body-building and increasing a new mother's milk, she is fed a very special diet. examples:-
  - a) Juice of Juwaano (Trachysperous ammi)
  - b) Naribal (an oily fruit - coconut)
  - c) Gai Khure (a green grass plant - ?)
  - d) Misri (Sugar candy)
  - e) Green spinach leaves are believed to be cold and the cause of a child's diarrhoea. Therefore they are not fed to new mothers.
  - f) Among some ethnic groups (not Brahmins and Chhetris), new mothers are fed alcohol (raksi).

g) Newars are especially known for the great amount of meat, rice and gur fed to new mothers. The more gur a husband can afford to feed his wife, the more status he will gain.

9. A new baby will not drink its own mother's first milk, for 1-2 days after birth it will be given to another nursing mother to suck. As far as possible, the family tries to find a good relative or friend to feed its baby at this time.

#### Childhood Diseases and Problems

1. If the body of young child is swollen, it is believed to be brought on by water.
2. If fever comes on suddenly, it is said to be brought on by wondering spirits.
3. If a small child (0-2 years old) has diarrhoea, it is said to have been caused by a scare (fright).
4. If a child dreams about bathing in water, it will get a cold.
5. If a child sits on a grinding stone, it will get sores on its bottom. They are, therefore, not allowed to play with the grinding stone.

6. If a pregnant woman touches a child, it will become runche (suffer from malnutrition).
7. If a mother's breast is swollen, it is believed to be due to witches.
8. Eating peanuts and soyabeans is said to cause difficulty in breathing.
9. If a child is chronically sick, it is believed to be caused by a wrong relationship among the planets (graha bigriyo).
10. If a person from outside the family comes in the room where a child is eating and covets the food (although he or she may not say), the baby will develop distaste for food (chokhe lagvo). The treatment for chokhe lagvo is to throw the food which the child does not want to eat on the leaf of the khirro plant (a poisonous plant) and throw it out.
11. Leprosy is believed to be the curse of the gods.
12. Smallpox and chickenpox are said to be caused by the goddess Sitalamai devi when she is angered. In the case of smallpox, Sitalamai Devi must be appeased by the family in the form of village worship. In the past, it was the custom to take the scab of one smallpox infected person, mix it

with water, and put some of it on all village people in order to give immunity.

13. The leaves of the Bhalayo (*Adus wallichli*) tree are often the cause of an allergic reaction on the skin. Therefore, one must make friends with these trees.

14. Fainting or sudden unconsciousness is a condition believed to be brought on by an angered god. Therefore, it is another example of a problem requiring a lama or jankari for curing.

15. If a child under 6 month's old must be taken away from the house, the precautions are taken to ward off evil spirits or witches by the following ways:

(a) While crossing a river- a handful of water is thrown back in the direction from which they came.

(b) A stone is thrown back at a tree.

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