

## 7. Beer, trees, pigs and chickens: medical tools of the Lohorung shaman and priest

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In much of the world the tools of the western medical practitioner are all too well known – the white coat, stethoscope, the prescription pad, thermometer and surgical instruments. Diagnosis of disease in biomedical terms is accepted and the taxonomy of the medical profession orders and interprets most health problems that occur. In Kathmandu, Nepal pharmacies are as full of antibiotics, aspirin, paracetamol and indigestion tablets as they are in London, but instead of the homeopathic alternatives there are ayurvedic ones from India. Yet for many people in Nepal, Kathmandu included, pains and symptoms are not primarily understood and experienced according to the assumptions of scientific medicine or in ayurvedic terms, but in terms of angry gods, evil spirits, ancestors and hungry ghosts or human witches. This is even more noticeably the case in rural East Nepal, with which I am concerned in this paper.<sup>1</sup> Even where some 'Western' medicines or hospitals can be reached within a few days walk, biomedical cures are often viewed with ambivalence. The logic is that, unless the primary source is dealt with by appeasing the ancestor or the angry spirit, the 'Western' cure cannot work and might make symptoms worse by aggravating the superhuman realm. Once problems with the superhuman realm have been addressed, then the non-traditional medicine can work.

But why should this be of archaeological concern? How can ideas about symptoms and cures in the Eastern hills of the Nepal Himalayas be of interest to those digging in the Amazon, Africa or Siberia? First, although the notion of 'Rai culture' is an anthropological device, an abstraction, embedded in it are certain views about illness which are more widely relevant to other groups. Their ideas about illness are intimately connected to cosmological ideas or a worldview which could be, at least in part, characterised as 'shamanic', 'animistic' and related to 'ancestor worship' and have an astonishing similarity to ideas and practices existing all over the world (see Eliade 1964; Hoppál and Howard 1993; Baldick 2000). Care, of course, needs to be taken not to over-generalise these terms and also in emphasising the diversity across cultures. Anthropologists from van Gennep's writing in 1903 to Kehoe in 2000 have argued at length the view that is shared by many anthropologists that the terms 'shaman' and 'shamanism' should be restricted to the peoples of Siberia, from whom the name derives. Nevertheless, a broader interpretation has suggested a universal phenomenon and it may be helpful for archaeologists to consider the cosmological components of

'shamanic' cultures, a point already put forward by the archaeologist Richard Bradley (2000, 32) writing about the archaeology of natural landscapes,

'The shamanic experiences are important for our purposes because these sensations may become associated with particular kinds of location in the landscape. Eliade writes of 'holes' or 'openings' and this is an apt description of the caves and rock fissures that play such a major part in the sacred geography of the Arctic and Classical worlds. He discusses the sensation of flight that is naturally associated with the trees and mountains that reach into the sky'.

Understanding shamanic experiences of ecstatic flight may be significant, as Bradley suggests, in throwing light on features of the natural landscape. This landscape of rivers, mountains and rocks is mapped as much by shamanic ritual journeys as by geography. In an altered state of consciousness ritual journeys are undertaken to encounter ancestors, spiritual beings and lost souls and these 'journeys' are perceived by practitioners to visit actual geographical locations. What should not be forgotten by archaeologists, however, in their haste to focus on content and not process, or from an inability to emerge from dualistic thinking, is the particular *attitude* to the natural landscape central to 'shamanism'. Although varying from culture to culture, all or parts of the natural landscape are understood as being imbued with some kind of power or 'spirit', but, as we shall see, this does not necessarily mean they are seen as 'sacred'. The centrality of this attitude in appreciating the medical tools of some cultures is a theme of this paper. Therefore, secondly, although this paper is concerned with specifically understanding the medical tools and instruments of Lohorung Rai<sup>2</sup> practitioners, it also aims to clarify this particular kind of attitude to the world, sometimes misinterpreted as being a sacralizing attitude, or crudely epitomised as 'animistic'.

Epitomising the Lohorung Rai view of the world as 'shamanic' and 'animistic' is vastly over-simplistic. What it does, however, is focus on a view, common in Nepal, that there are different ways of 'knowing' and 'understanding' the world and that the way to understand the 'true' nature of things is by means of those shamans and priests who can relate to a spiritual and ancestral world and who understand the spiritual forces at work in the cosmos. It also focuses on understanding the complicated and subtle ideas about the existence of a power or quality which endows a vitality or power to certain material and natural objects. The three hearth stones, beer and trees, for example, as well as pigs and chickens have this quality and are crucial to restoring well-being when sickness and misfortune occur<sup>3</sup>. These objects and animals are central to the curative process but understanding their role and significance as healing tools must present a problem for the archaeologist. Firstly, what bestows power on the tools is nothing intrinsic to the objects or animals themselves, but is conceptual and, therefore, not immediately accessible to the archaeologist. The second problem is the impermanence of the tools. In most healing rituals, the healing tools specific to that ritual are obliterated: some are left to rot, some are destroyed in sacrifice and others are taken away by the household to be consumed by the living. Nothing is left for posterity. Re-creation is a central component of the ritual activity and the subsequent

obliteration of material evidence is therefore of its essence. However, if archaeologists have evidence of people who are replicating the nature of human life in this world in their conception of another world in the way, for example, that the dead are catered for just like the living; if they have evidence of 'shamanism' whether in rock art or artifacts such as drums or headgear and if there are no permanent temples or shrines to be found, then it might not be too much of a leap of the imagination to infer the significance of natural places as ritual places and natural objects as healing tools. What I want to elaborate in this paper is how these tools are viewed. Doing so involves understanding 'animism' by which I mean, following 'a relational (not a failed) epistemology' (Bird-David 1999, 69); a way of knowing that is common to human beings everywhere, but which in the modern state has lost much of its authority. This way of relating to the world is important for any archaeologists interested in understanding the different ways in which natural objects and the natural landscape can have significant value in the conceptual framework of a culture.

In the first sections in this paper I explain how Lohorung Rai practitioners and their tools are classified and how Lohorung divide the material world into those objects. Certain animals, trees and plants have ritual names and can, therefore, be used as medical instruments; certain ones cannot. The middle section looks at several performances, the symbolism and meaning of the shrines, the ritual objects and animals, the healing ritual itself and how these and the construction of a shrine reveals Lohorung attitudes to health and disease. The final part of the paper suggests some interpretations of the rituals and the significance of the tools.

## CLASSIFYING THE WORLD

Three factors dominate the lives of Lohorung and other Kiranti, these sedentary agriculturalists; the saturation of their lives with spiritual beings; a tendency to embody these beings in objects and images, to give concrete shape to an ancestor in a shrine, in the kind of beer, tree and food he or she desires; and thirdly the pre-eminence of the 'ancestral order'.

It is this last factor that I wish to discuss first since it is the key frame of reference to be understood in relation to Lohorung beliefs and ideas about illness and in their classification of the world, including their classification of which tools can be used in healing rituals and which cannot. For Lohorung to maintain 'good health' they consider it essential to recreate the 'natural' ancestral order, the original primeval order as recorded in myths, and to reaffirm the unity between nature, superhuman beings and human beings. They have what Herzfeld (2001, 102) calls a 'structural nostalgia', a view that the world was once a place of perfect balance and reciprocity, untouched by the corruptions of time. Even if not absolutely perfect, then it is at least undeniably powerful, since failure to recreate and maintain relations with the ancestral world leads to depression, increased sickness, possibly death, and ensuing chaos. In contrast, repetition of ancestral words and adherence to ancestral order acts as a way of recharging the cosmos. It brings vitality.

It is all three factors which lie behind the Lohorung propensity to divide the world



into those objects considered 'ancestral' and those which are 'not ancestral'. Animals, trees, plants and objects that have an 'ancestral ritual name' (*samek*) are distinguished from those which do not; only phenomena with *samek* names can be used as ritual tools or as we might say 'medical instruments'. Only they 'belong' to primeval time. The trees to which the ancestors are called, the branches used as weapons, the places where they sit, the pillars of the house, the three stones of the hearth, the plants and bamboo, water pitchers, gourds of beer, the ladder of the house, the sacrificial chicken or pig used in a ritual all have *samek* names and have a relationship with ancestors. Everything with a ritual *samek* name is tribal, traditional and ancient. They are the continuation of ancestral time, thereby ensuring its immortality. In spite of the global trend towards modernisation (the Lohorung, too, like modern Indian fabric, mirrors and radios), they still conceive of the strength, support and protection of their clans and society as coming from the primeval past.

*Samek* is, then, the 'original' or proto-name and is linked to a whole body of myths and knowledge about Original Beings and ancestors. That tradition which is understood by most Kiranti groups to be partially shared by all of them is referred to as *mundhum* or *muddum*, though local terms also apply. The significance of this ancestral ritual name in terms of healing is the power that medical instruments derive from their connection with this ancestral past. They are attributed with a quality which makes them 'alive' in the sense that it gives them strength and a kind of vitality, which is as vulnerable to loss as it is among humans. The attribution of human characteristics such as vitality and consciousness to these material and natural objects shifts people's attitudes towards them, particularly in ritual situations, but it does not make them 'sacred' in themselves. The special kind of ancestral vitality or force is also shared by humans. It binds together humans and these natural entities with ritual names in a relational sense. The 'quality' or 'vital strength' that bonds them among Lohorung Rai is called *saya*. The concept is not easy to translate, and I have dealt with it in depth elsewhere (Hardman 1981). In brief it is more than vitality and more than a 'soul', which does convey its metaphysical aspect. *Saya* could be called a life force and a 'power', almost like a magical energy, its power deriving from its link with the ancestral past. It is like an ancestral spirit or a powerful principle infusing all persons and some natural and material objects with an energy. Unless *saya* is flourishing people lose all vitality and the will to live; plants and trees droop, stones become brittle. *Saya* is also 'power' in the sense of resistance to misfortune and disease and an inner resource to face the world with head held high, deriving from and depending upon good relations with ancestors. All 'medical tools' used by shamans and priests, whether inanimate objects or natural phenomena, possess this key quality.

A female shaman (*mangmani*) from the village of Pangma (see Fig. 7.1) explained to me that if there were no ritual names (*samek*), people could not talk to ancestors. With *samek* names ancestors understand, experience and can therefore act; they relate to the names and objects they are familiar with, that is, *samek* is the ancestral language and can therefore raise and strengthen *saya*. Objects with *samek* names and the vital *saya* energy 'belong' to the ancestors. The shaman said,

'So it is that all trees, leaves, *singlung* have an ancestral name. That is 'green grass', that is 'stone'. We are 'man'. We became rich by grass and stone.



Figure 7.1. The mangmani of Pangma village.

Once it was all free, and as people claimed it they named it: that green grass also has *samek*. It is owned. Everything had a *samek*, making it a separate kind; fire has *samek*, door has *samek*; we call maize *lingkhama*, rice we call *rungkhama* and millet *wekhama*; money is *pekham*, bamboo is *yangli'powa*. With these names the ancestors claimed ownership.'

Objects like the hearth-stones, trees like *waiphu*, animals like pigs and birds like chickens exist in a different order of reality from objects like tea or ploughs that are relatively new to the Nepalese hills. Beer, trees, pigs and chickens can be used as tools to communicate with ancestors and therefore as tools to cure because they already have a relationship with ancestors. They were brought into being, or valued, by the creators of Lohorung society (see also Allen 1974; Gaenszle 1991, 1993). As a necessary part of its creation, and as part of its history, myths and traditions each of these natural entities has a necessary part in its continuation and has a role to play in healing rituals. In present times, the attribute of *saya*, the vital ancestral power, functions metaphysically as the transcendent unity connecting human beings, natural objects and material objects with ancestors and the primeval past, acting as an energising force. This is not how it used to be in the original primeval order. Then, beer, trees, stones, water springs, plants, birds, pigs and chickens (all things now

possessing *saya* and a *samek* name), could speak and understand humans. This was at the time when ancestors were still establishing clan territories and they could communicate with the spirits and the objects of the natural landscape. So ancestors of one clan could say 'so now you are our water spring (*chawa*)' and it became theirs, protecting them and giving them an identity. Now, in this new age, man has lost these powers, leaving only the *yatanga* (local priests) and *mangpa* (shaman) to act as the mediums. Only they really know the old language, only they can 'see' the cosmic paths to find the ancestors, or angry ghosts of the dead, and therefore only they who can restore balance and good health when misfortune or illness strikes, still using, however, the tools of the past.

In this section we have already begun to see that the order of existence of Lohorung medical tools is connected to their animated status in myth and their relationship with the culture heroes and powerful, creative ancestors. Beer, trees, pigs and chickens all have *samek* names, all are connected to mythical stories and to particular ancestors, and all possess the vitalising quality of *saya*. We cannot apply any apparent intuitive distinction between 'animate' and 'inanimate'. For Lohorung these primary ontological categories are not key. Instead, they focus on different ways of being in the world. Beer has a way of being in the world, which links it to trees and chickens. All three are treated with respect not because they are seen as 'animate', but because they are associated, through the quality of *saya*, with the mythical realm and this gives them a kind of consciousness. Clearly there are differences (e.g. beer does not have 'breath', *sokma*). In ontological terms what all of them share is the key essence of *saya* which gives them a special relationship both to living humans and the ancestors.

## THE 'PRACTITIONERS'

The cosmology of Lohorung Rai, as of their neighbouring Rai and Limbu 'brothers' (and a key feature of most shamanic cultures), is based on a view of the universe that is divided into three worlds: an upper, a middle and a watery lower world. Humanity lives in the middle world. The lower world is associated with the primeval snake ancestors living mainly in rivers and mountain springs. The ancestors and well-integrated dead (*sammang*) live in the upper world, separate, however, from spirits or ghosts resulting from unnatural or inauspicious death, who are excluded from the land of the dead and destined to roam hungry, thirsty and lonely which forces them to attack humans and inhabit the middle world (for a detailed description of these different spirits and ancestors see Hardman 2000, 59–101).

Illness and misfortune are associated with the spiritual beings inhabiting all three realms. To deal with the illnesses are two classes of ritual practitioner (as there are among other Kiranti), the local priests (*yatanga*) and shamans called *mangpa*. These act as the main intermediaries between the world of the living and the 'other worlds', the world of the ancestors, ghosts of the dead, spirits and gods who intermittently interfere with the bodies, minds, vitality, crops and world of the living. Although it is common knowledge in Nepal that everyone can reach the 'other world' by means of their dreams, Lohorung, like other Rai, Limbu or Tamang, talk about the need for



special practitioners to act as experts, whose work is in understanding and manipulating powers in this and the other worlds. They are understood to have their own ways of knowing and working. Their skills lie in diagnosing, divining, becoming possessed or making shamanic journeys, often in a trance state. My Lohorung friend Anuma was worried that I would not have access to either *yatangpa*, local priests or shaman, *mangpa*, in England. Given her understanding of the powers of superhuman beings to interpenetrate the lives, bodies and world of the living, I was in considerable danger. Having initiated a relationship with them, if I did not attend to them, pay them respect, feed them I would be ill and without anyone to communicate with them for me.

Of the two key Lohorung ritual officiants with knowledge to use the medical tools, the *yatangpa* is considered to be the most important; the *mangpa*, the shaman, is more dramatic, being like the pan-Nepali *jhānkri* (N). The *yatangpa* is essential for performing rites of passage, birth, marriage, death and responsible for the ancestors, performing the annual renewal of the house shrine, and the ritual at the harvesting of first crops; the annual rite to all ancestors. He is able to maintain a harmonious relationship with the most important superhumans, their own ancestors, who are almost like deities, and when disorder occurs in the form of sickness or misfortune, he is the most sought after officiant. Every Lohorung household must have access to a *yatangpa* – their doctor, priest, psychopomp, and diviner all in one. Chitra Bahadur, a Gurkha now living in England, told me that no Lohorung could envisage life without one. On the other hand, Lohorung ‘illness’ is often the unwanted anger and hunger, desires and feelings of all kinds of spirits and ghosts of the dead and to deal with these the more ecstatic *mangpa* (female *mangmani*) shamans, and the pan-Nepali *jhānkri*. Nepali speaking shamans may be called in to help. *Mangpa* and *mangmani* deal with the broadest spectrum of superhuman beings – Lohorung ones and the deities, ghosts and spirits of other tribes such as Tamang, Gurung, and Sherpa, and those of the Hindu Chetrī and Bahun.

The key skill of the Lohorung specialists has to do with altered states of consciousness, ‘seeing’ and performing, in contrast to knowing the right things, and talking and writing the right way, like the Western doctor. The Western doctor relies on a skill to diagnose and on knowledge of a biomedical or surgical cure. The skill of the tribal *mangpa* and *yatangpa* is as mediators between the spirit world and the human world, dependent on their ability to ‘see’ – hence their name *khangkhuba* ‘ones who can see’ – and on their ability to communicate with the ancestral and spirit world using their ‘medical tools’. Like other shamans all over the world (see Winkelman 2000) they have the ability to go into altered states of consciousness at will and perceive what is for most human beings normally an intangible and invisible dimension. This is the upper world or lower world, dimensions where ancestors can be encountered, where mediating officiants can communicate with natural phenomena like trees, mountains, or rivers connected to the ancestral world. Understanding this dimension means accepting a mystical interconnectedness of phenomena, which are linked to culture heroes and primordial ancestors; and that their medical tools have a powerful resonance in this dimension which helps to facilitate communication.

One *yatangpa*, the oldest in Pangma village, explained the power of ‘seeing’, so

crucial to healing, as lying deep in the belly and as coming from deep in his memory, mind, and consciousness (the oldest and most secret bits conceived as residing in the belly). 'Seeing' is also understood in terms of *lemmang* and *semmang*. What we can see when awake – in waking vision (*lemmang*) is limited. In another vision (*semmang*) restrictions of time and space and the divisions of the world disappear. It is explored by everyone in their dreams, and by *mangpa* and *yatangpa* who have been chosen to 'see' that aspect of the world. Since other human beings have lost the ability to 'see' and talk to this other reality, the ability of shamans and priests to 'see' is accepted as a valuable and authoritative way of knowing the world. The medicinal tools of beer, trees, pigs and chickens are not only material and visual connections between these two different worlds, they are perceptible forms that make the mysteries of the ancestral reality and the primeval world more accessible to the patient.

What I would like to show is the context and use of these 'medical' ritual instruments and how they are used to help Lohorung shamans and priests return a patient to health.

## PRIESTS AND THEIR MEDICAL TOOLS

Earlier in this paper I mentioned the close relationship existing between ancestors and those natural objects possessing a ritual (*samek*) name and an animating life force (*saya*). To obtain a diagnosis of any illness the tools used must possess these two elements. Ginger and leaves are the most favoured tools for divination. When the *yatangpa* divines he throws uncooked rice and then pieces of ginger onto banana leaves. If the ginger falls the right way up, with the newly cut side showing, then that ancestor is not angry and could not be involved in the illness. If it falls upside down, this is understood as a clear indication that the ancestor is hungry and angry. When Nanda, the woman of the house I was living in fell ill early on in fieldwork, the divination to find out what was wrong didn't take long. The divination with ginger was done and the *yatangpa* announced it was *pappamama'chi*, 'grandfather-grandmother' ancestor. These are the guardian grandparents including all the Lohorung's remotest and closest ancestors who have died a natural death and including the 'kings' and 'queens' who created the cultural order and institutional models to which society should adhere today. If angered, these beings need a grand sacrifice to pacify them. This ritual needed one pig, six chickens and twelve eggs. The leaves were carefully wrapped up by her husband in a cloth. The woman of the house already seemed better. She had stopped moaning and could talk and drink a little *dibu* (millet beer). The *yatangpa* was given warm beer in a *tongba*, a bamboo container with a thin bamboo pipe to suck up the liquid, the form of hospitality indicating respect. This is the way that beer is most often given to ancestors.

It should be said here that alcohol in general is valued and regarded as a 'powerful' (meaning 'clever', *ichuba*), agent. There is a story about how the early ancestors, 'forest people' discovered the effects of alcohol, 'They dried the leaves of the creeper called *habektangma*, crumbled them to dust and put it in the water and drank it. They found they were a little drunk and very strong. They did much work and felt good: 'our



bodies are good now. They tried adding it to maize, then to millet and then later to rice and it tasted good. But if people drank just a little too much then they cried like a dog, if they drank more, they fought like a bear and if they drank even more they lost their mind and slept like a snake'.

It is only women who know how to make beer and only they who brew, store and serve it, including for medicinal purposes such as during labour. Beer is offered, following a complex code of hospitality, to all human guests and offerings of beer are made in all indigenous Lohorung rituals to ancestors and ghosts of the dead. Given the unequivocal pleasure it offers, its 'medicinal' value for priests and shamans lies in its ability to lure or coax ancestral and spiritual beings and at the same time indicate respect.

On another occasion when Nanda was sick the *yatangpa* sat with a branch of *sibung* in Lohorung, or *titepāti* (Mugwort, *Artemis vulgaris*). This is a medicinal tool and a medicine. It is a medicine for bellyache and for aching knees. As an instrument it offers protection for women who carry sprigs of it when they walk anywhere away from the safe areas of the compound and the immediate village, and even within the village if they are out at night. They wear the leaves tucked into their wide waist bands and occasionally mutter words commanding the spirits to stick to their own path and not to wander into those of the living. As a tool of the *yatangpa* during diagnosis it offers protection from ghosts of the dead. Nanda brought the *yatangpa* a metal plate and some ginger. He stuck one end of each piece of ginger into some ash and waived the branch of *titepāti* over the plate. Shaking gently in his cross-legged position he seemed to enter momentarily an altered state of consciousness; he threw each piece of ginger in turn onto the plate naming each ancestor. If it were to fall with the clean side facing up then this would be a good sign, if ash-side up then it would show the source of the sickness. On this occasion the problem lay with *Chawatangma*, the most fickle and difficult of the ancestors, requiring three chickens, one for *Chawatangma* herself and two for *Sikāri* her constant companion.

Lohorung in Pangma village talked constantly about how bad pain is until *Chawatangma* is promised her ritual. Once recognised as 'queen' (*hangma*), her status reaffirmed and the offerings of chickens promised, the pain from *Chawatangma* usually lessens. Since Nanda was ill for another week, the *yatangpa*, who had diagnosed the hunger of *pappamama'chi*, came several times more and found 'the house ancestor' (*khimpie*) was angry as well and would have to be offered two chickens.

Let us now look at how the ritual tools for different causes of illness relate to the characteristics of the offending ancestor and how the shrines and tools of *Chawatangma* differ from those of *pappamama'chi* or other ancestors whose ritual is performed in the house. Why is she so feared? Why are so many illnesses associated with her? In terms of characteristics *Chawatangma* is perceived as the most creative of all the ancestors having fashioned the natural world from which her names derive. She has over twenty names, each indicating an area of her powers, an attribute or role, such as *bakhatangma*, owner/woman of the soil, *tapnamtangma*, owner/woman of the forest, *serepmotangma*, youngest one, *singtowatangma*, owner/woman of the trees, *lungtongtangma*, owner/woman of stones and rocks. As *khewama* she gives cotton to *mangpa* shamans; as *lilaoti*, *goanleni*, she is a village spirit, as *dewatangma*, a mother goddess. Her proper name is

*Yagangma* and she is described as being an old woman, having breasts so long that they fall down her legs. When she walks she throws them over her shoulder to keep them out of the way.

As well as being the most creative ancestor, however, *Chawatangma* is also the archetypal 'wild' ancestor, amoral, greedy, jealous and untamed. On purpose, she ignores Lohorung traditions and social institutions created by the culture heroes of the myths and works, instead, to undermine morality. Typifying everything that is anti-social she is the opposite of the guardian grandparents (*pappamama'chi*), and the ancestors of the house shrine (*Khammang/Yimi*), and is known as once being the teacher of human witches. She attacks people's minds so they do not know right from wrong; they cannot behave 'properly', and eventually lose their senses. She entices away the *lawa* (essence of life, vital soul) of adults and children, putting her victims in danger of death. Typically, *lawa* is lost through fright and so *Chawatangma* frightens a child, the *lawa* leaves and she hides it under a tree, stone, at the top of a bamboo tree, in the depths of water or under the wing of a chicken. When she is simply 'angry' or hungry the human symptoms are sore eyes, nose, throat, or aching limbs and bellyache.

As owner of the forests, trees, the animals living there, and of all the natural landscape – rivers, stones, rocks, fields – *Chawatangma* is seen as having enormous power over men and women. Having created the natural world and the variety of species within it she demands recognition of her ownership, respect for her domain and seeks revenge if it's not given, such as keeping animals hidden from hunters or causing injuries when people try to fell her trees without permission. If bribed she can bring wealth in the form of plentiful crops of rice, maize and millet. Her price? Lavish offerings must be made of beer, pigs and chickens, sacrificed in secret in the privacy of the household domain, within the compound or inside the house. The key to the success of these rites lies in their secrecy. No other lineage member shares the sacrificial offering or the ensuing meal and since no one can know about it but the household members, they perform it in the middle of the night without any priest or shaman. What we have here is the antipathy of core Lohorung values: lack of sociability and egalitarianism, lack of honesty and openness to the lineage group, and a household acting just for its own greed, but, as we have seen, *Chawatangma* encourages these. Once such an intimate relationship with *Chawatangma* has started she can hold the household to ransom using sickness of a household member as the ransom. During fieldwork in 1980 one boy had lost his mind (*niwa*), his sense of right and wrong; he was eating his own faeces and had lost his hearing. The village talked of how the household performed *Chawatangma* rituals in secret.

The appropriate location for the *Chawatangma* ritual is on the outskirts of the forest or in a dense bamboo grove on the outskirts of the village. She is part of the 'wild' and the location of her shrine in the forest reflects her ability and desire to undermine the 'civilised' world and its social institutions. A ritual 'house' or shrine is constructed for *Chawatangma*. Significantly, the 'house' is a miniature of the shelters Lohorung make for themselves in the forest, not a 'civilised' house like some of the ancestral shrines, which are made closer to the image of their own homes (see Fig. 7.2). *Chawatangma's* house shrine consists of a semi-circle of branches from the *chigaphu* tree (*N. patle katuji*) or *yangsingphu* tree (*N. chilaune*)<sup>4</sup>, with the leaves creating a kind of roof. *Chawatangma's*



Figure 7.2. Shrine for Pappamama'chi.

companion, however, one of the *sikāri* hunters, who is always given a shrine alongside the Old Woman, has a more civilised 'house' made of the *sigaphu* tree, often used in housebuilding. A feature of Lohorung stilt homes and a symbol of Lohorung 'culture' is the wooden house ladder. The *sikāri* hunter's shrine boasts a symbolic representation – a miniature house ladder. We can see here how the male companion is represented as a civilising influence. A hunter, he is also guard and companion to the ancestor and armed with a bow and arrow. Bamboo, for Lohorung and other Kiranti, in the form of the bow and arrow, is another symbol of a civilising force, a symbol of cultural order which can be overturned by the wild and uncontrolled *primaeval* ancestors (see Hardman 2000, 113–120).

The structure, form, and location of *Chawatangma's* shrine creates a tangible and visible image of her essential characteristics for those involved in the ritual. In the same way shrines for other ancestors similarly reflect their key characteristics. From a Kiranti perspective houses reflect who you are. The household is the key economic, political and ritual unit, not an individual. The significance of the house relates to a key myth describing the founding elements of Rai culture, namely housebuilding and house initiation, as well as agriculture, and theft by marriage. Houses are fundamental





Figure 7.3. A destructible, temporary shrine.

to the nature of personhood. Reflecting this, houses must be built in a particular way and the microcosm of the 'civilised' Lohorung house is found in the house shrine for *Khammang* and *Yimi*, made symbolically just as a house is made. These are the ancestors who are guardians of what is spiritually and morally correct and their shrine hangs in a secluded corner of the house, located on the 'uphill' 'front' wall behind and above the hearth, or on the same wall but in the attic. This space is associated with that which is male, the patriline.

We can see how the forest or bamboo grove, a 'natural place' has ethnographic significance in Lohorung ritual. Bradley comments, 'Natural Places have an archaeology because they acquired a significance in the *minds* of people in the past. That did not necessarily make any impact on their outward appearance, but one way of recognising the importance of these locations is through the evidence of human activity that is discovered there' (2000, 35). The problem, is what kind of remains might be discovered? The difficulty for the archaeologist, as mentioned at the beginning, is that these tree 'houses' which are in essence destructible, temporary shrines, act to house and, at the same time, represent the ancestral spirits only for as long as the ritual lasts (see Fig. 7.3).

These ritual shrines create mediated relations with the ancestor. We might say that they encode memory, to assist in representing and recreating mythical stories. We might also see them as the 'surgical setting', made in the correct form for the particular cure to take place. In this sense the trees (*sing*), or rather the branches which must be fresh and 'alive' (*hingrikpa*), are key 'tools' in any cure. Belonging to the world of ancestors, who are mostly 'forest people' (*tapnam yapmi*), the tree shrines can suggest ideas of creating the 'other' world of the past. Without them ancestors could not be summoned. The trees provide the framework or structure around which the other

medicinal tools, the beer, and pig or chicken, can be placed. They stage the event. For *Chawatangma* fire is brought to the clearing as well as the other key ingredients for the curative process –cooked rice, two eggs, ginger, a vessel of water, beer (in the form of a bamboo *tongba* and a gourd full of thick millet beer), lentils and soya beans (because *Chawatangma* used to grow them) and the chickens. All must come from the house of the patient: ancestors only accept offerings of the household's own produce, the fruits of the labours of their own hands and animals raised by their own clan.

Lohorung attitudes to the natural landscape, the jungle and forests, rivers, lakes and mountains are closely associated with *Chawatangma*. Women in particular fear and avoid the forest, never going through one alone and always carrying a protective weapon, such as branches of *titepāti* (Mugwort, *Artemis vulgaris*) and offerings of beer. The jungle, associated with *Chawatangma*, is the symbolic opposite of the house; it represents danger, the 'wild', the uncontrolled and uncivilised from which the roots of their society were born. To enter the dense jungle is almost to enter primordial time. The landscape is primordial and ancestors may be given respect there, but it would be a misinterpretation to apply the word 'sacred' to the geography or the landscape. To imply that certain spaces are 'sacred' and others are 'profane' (following Durkheim) misunderstands that space can be both at the same time or neither. For example the forest belongs to *Chawatangma*. It symbolises her values; nature rules, not culture. She rejects traditional values and behaviour and the complete opposite of the guardian ancestors (*pappamamma'chi*) who represent moral perfection and civilisation as created by the culture heroes. Mostly the forest is neither sacred nor profane. For a while, during a ritual, however, space in the forest is seen as 'apart' from the rest of the world; Lohorung see it as being 'closed off' from 'this world' for the duration of the rite. What sacralizes that space is the attitude of the priest (*yatangpa*) or shaman (*mangpa*) and those involved for the duration of their activities in which communication is made with the other cosmological realms and with ancestral beings. This attitude shifts ritual objects as well as space onto a metaphysical plane in which time and space and categories of the ordinary no longer apply and everything imbued with the power of *saya* is revitalised.

Central to this process of revitalisation in each ancestral ritual is the 'ritual journey' made by the *yatangpa*. The journey could be mapped onto the landscape and the path for each ancestor is a defining feature of their ritual. The officiant – whether *mangpa* or *yatangpa* – is in a trance state but never in these ancestral rites is he or she in an ecstatic state involving dancing, drumming, hyperactivity and visual hallucinations. Rather, officiants experience more meditative type trances. The shaman or priest concentrates on the shrine, the tree houses, the offerings laid out, the beer and the sacrificial chickens; they then journey on a mental or imaginary flight, much as one might in Western visualisation, but here reenacting a stylized and traditional journey that has power in its very reenactment.

Speaking in ritual language, using the *samek* names and describing all the objects, the officiant begins at the shrine. There is a real sense here of the magical power of words, that the ritual is not only about something, but does something (Austin 1962), its efficacy depending on a rhetorical power of words. In this case the efficacy depends on demanding the attention of the ancestors and communicating the presence of the



Figure 7.4. The yatangpa plays a plate (like a drum) to help him on his ritual 'journey'.

house construction and all the offerings of beer, ginger, etc. and transporting them into the superhuman realm by means of ritual language.

The shaman or priest chants:

*telladam lasudam* (the leaf on which offering placed)  
*kasudam tambodam*, (the copper bowl, the pitcher)  
*sakbalitham pi'malitham* (the tongba beer vessel and the thin pipe)  
*subi'ma lam, kongbi'ma lam* (ginger)  
*sibungma mabungma* (*titep~ôti* Mugwort)  
*elawahangma choyahangma yo!* (*Chawatangma*)  
*me'lo'wa lam chekchekwa lam* (the bird path)

Starting at the shrine (*thān*) the journey follows the 'path of the earth'. Specifically, this follows 'the way under the earth, arising up at springs', then goes under white earth, then red earth emerging at the nearby town of Dingla. Emerging from the earth the *yatangpa* flies as a bird and comes to a lake, but then searches for the clan's own spring (*chawa*) drinks and sours up to the high Himalayas, to a gold lake where he can communicate with *Chawatangma* and *Sikāri* and give them respect.



*singtang'so anam'no, lungtang'so anam'no* (you own all the trees, all the stones).

The ancestors are offered the beer, the rice and the chicken, and the ritual name of the sick patient gives her identity:

'we offer beer and liquor of all kinds; this is the *lawa*, this is the piece of clothing belonging to a *wekhama* (the sick female member of *hangkhim* clan)'.

*Chawatangma* is told 'even if you don't feel like eating and drinking, eat and drink'. It is made clear who is talking to her, what clan the *yatangpa* belongs to, what clan the patient belongs to; he names the season and the path they are following to encourage her not to feel angry or neglected. Dealing with her firmly he asks her to :

make clear the *lawa*, tell (me) and make clear the paths of my dreams, give well-being and good fortune! Give comfort and fortune; raise their *saya* as high as the snowy mountains; if our *saya* has grown small, make these *saya* tall! Protect us from the evil spirits, ghosts, spirits of dead ancestors, from bad gods who give diseases, from male witches.

*Bakhatangma*, eh! yo!, *tapnamtangma*, *serepmotangma*, yo! *Saya* of ginger, *saya* of all the things laid out on the leaf in front of the shrine, and the *saya* of the ginger again, yes the *saya*, ye! *saya* of the *raksi* liquor, *saya* of the beer, ya:y! ha:y! (we have) protected and enclosed the *saya* of the chicken, oh yes, up until now we have! the female hen, the chosen one, we have covered with a basket, yes, we have protected them.

At this point the hen is hit on the back with a wooden stick and killed. The *yatangpa* describes this in ritual language going on to describe how he directs a few drops of blood from the chicken's mouth to fall into the middle of the liquor, *raksi*. If *Chawatangma* is offered a pig it is sacrificed by being shot in the heart with an arrow. The objective is to lose as little blood as possible – a point I will return to below – but enough to prove to *Chawatangma* that the animal has been killed. She is asked to accept the offering, whether a pig or a chicken, and is asked in return that she keep to her own place:

'Take it! Take the blood, take the chicken/take the pig, take it!'

And again the *yatangpa* describes the path that he is following in his journey in his trance state, the season, his ritual clan name and again requests clear dreams, health, good fortune, well-being, wealth, and ends by saying:

'From today onwards take away bad omens, tears coming from the chicken, water from its nose; protect us with the splayed out peacock's tail, surround us with it, protect us.'

For some ancestors, the *yatangpa* in his trance state has to take 'the path of the rivers'; for another it may be 'the flower way', which is one of the hardest mystical journeys. The rivers and the flowers are associated with the transition to another world. In every *sammang* the officiant has to describe in ritual language whatever material objects are being offered at the beginning and end of the journey. The ancestors would not understand just the spoken words; for them beer is *sakbalitham pi'malitham*, 'egg' is *bombulu*, 'pig' is *sopakma hangpasa*, 'chicken' is *pichali'wa sampongli'wa* and so on. To

take an outsider's view for a moment, the knowledge that the words spoken have the power to communicate with the very ancestors connected to their pain may be, for a Lohorung patient, as powerful a relief as taking a pill that will deal directly with the source of pain even if the pill is a placebo. Certainly some Lohorung describe relief once the words have been spoken. For us, too, instilling or rekindling hope is a central part of the healing process (see Spiro, 1998).

Offering blood increases the hope of cure since blood sacrifice is also recognised as the most effective way to change the mood of the ancestors. Blood is the essential 'medical tool' in all *sammang* ancestral rituals. It is the symbol of fertility and prosperity. Both menstrual blood and the vital ancestral force of *saya* are symbolised as flowers. Blood and flowers are closely associated with a vital force amongst several Kiranti peoples (e.g. see Sagant 1991[1981]). We could also say that ancestors need to see the blood to realise the continued closeness of blood brothers, to see that the blood ties are renewed. Moreover, from the blood, ancestors know that meat is being offered and to eat meat is to feast. To eat a lot of meat is seen as good for health: meat is a symbol of wealth. However, to appreciate the full significance of blood as a 'medical tool', the myth of origin needs to be mentioned. By offering blood, human beings originally achieved their desired goal of emerging from the Primal Lake. In the myth a bird takes the place of a human blood offering. Birds are mythically the closest and most 'natural' substitute for humans. In Lohorung, Thulung Rai, Mewahang Rai and Dumi Rai mythology, human characters are at times represented as birds – that is, as part of the natural world and not separated from it (Allen 1976a, b & c; Gaenszle 1991; Hardman 2000). The characters are as if human but their other 'natural qualities', like their ability to fly, make it clear that they are bird-like. Reflecting this close identification with birds, each clan also has a bird that it cannot eat – the bird that is seen as an identifying feature of the clan. The black bird *kālo jureli*, known in Lohorung as *kerokpa*, is not eaten by the Lamsong clan; *yangkoama* is not eaten by Yangkhrung; *lelo'wa* by Dekhim, and so on. Given this closeness to birds it is not surprising that just as Lohorung do not sacrifice human beings, nor do they sacrifice birds – with just one exception. It is the domesticated fowl living alongside humans, which is sacrificed. One reason, I was told, that they are chosen to be sacrificed 'in our place' is that – like humans – chickens cannot fly and can therefore be easily caught. Pigs are also seen as being bonded to humans. They live under their stilt houses; like humans they suckle their young. According to Lohorung tradition, pigs and chickens made a pact with the ancestors migrating from the Primal Lake and agreed to this fate, knowing the importance of blood in manipulating successful outcomes. As the old man from Diding told me,

'Chickens and pigs are offered in our place. *Sammang* rites had to be done as they migrated, and it was with chickens and pigs that they made a promise. 'I'll go in your place' said the pig and so did the chicken. In place of human offerings we took their blood instead. It was same as offering our sister.'

Lohorung sacrifice is the ritual killing of substitutes as a way of ensuring contact and communication with ancestors. They employ the symbolism of killing, the shedding of blood in minute quantities, to recreate the links with the ancestors. This in turn brings

about rebirth of the original order and revitalization, which in turn will raise the *saya*, the vital energy, of all concerned. The efficacy for Lohorung and other Kiranti lies in two things: the appearance of blood and not watery saliva (*makwa*), and the correct performance of the communication which, along with the offerings, has the regenerative effect of restoring the vitality of the patient and countering the demoralization of the ancestor – by raising *saya* (see Sagant 1991 for a description of a similar Limbu ritual).

The efficacy of the original rite, a blood sacrifice, made by the original Kiranti brothers, the mythical ancestors, to leave the Primal Lake, laid the model for later rites which work by communicating with the ancestors with the appropriate blood offering. This Lohorung rite can be compared with Vedic and classical Indian sacrifice, in which every act of sacrifice refers back to the creation of the world: 'every sacrifice may be said to replicate the primal act of Prajapati who produced creation by the sacrificial dismemberment of his own body ... Any sacrifice, then ... maintains or repairs the cosmic order ... It therefore represents a renewal of time' (Parry 1982, 77; see also Eliade 1964, 11). The effectiveness of the communication, which is linked to its correct performance, is similar to the Brahmanic tradition in which 'in its very carrying out, the order of the world is reproduced and maintained. The right order of sacrifice is, and assures, the right order of the world' (Herrenschmidt 1982, 26).

Blood must not flow in any great quantity in any indigenous Lohorung ritual: what is important is just a few drops. If the sacrificial chickens are very small their heads have to be chopped off to produce the drops of blood. Larger chickens produce drops of blood from the mouth when killed by hitting them hard on their spine with a stick. If we look at the way in which the order of the world is linked to sacrifice, the key to it is in the myth in which the primal ancestors emerged from the Primal Lake but also in the notion that blood is connected to the vital force (*saya*). The order of the world is maintained and restored to harmony when the correct sacrifice and correct ritual chant, re-enacting the original ritual, are performed so that *saya* is raised. Sacrifice is an act of universal regeneration. The restoration of a mystical union through sacrifice was of course also one of the key elements to sacrifice noted in the anthropological essay by Hubert and Mauss ([1899] 1964). For Lohorung the order of the world is based on a mystical union between living and ancestors in the form of *saya* and links explicitly to sacrifice since, correctly performed, this is how *saya* is raised, and the connection accounts for its effectiveness.

It is important to remember that sacrifice is both useful and an obligation: sacrifice as a form of gift creates an obligation: 'if he gives it is partly in order to receive ... Disinterestedness is mingled with self-interest. That is why it has so frequently been conceived as a form of contract' (Hubert and Mauss [1899] 1964, 100). Lohorung have expectations that the offering of their own domestic chickens or pigs, symbols of the original sacrificial victim, will placate the ancestors and restore the sick person to health. We can see here how crucial pigs and chickens are as medical tools.

The shape of their shrine and the material objects laid out for the ancestors is both a model of what they as living human beings liked best and a model for controlling them. In other words, the idea of the rituals and the tools is twofold: first to please and placate and persuade the ancestors back into a strong relationship with the household



and, secondly, to regain control of the ancestors. The location of the shrine is significant, as well as how the trees are used to give it shape and meaning. Every human being and every 'ancestor' (*sammang*) has some material tool which is, for them, the most useful and important thing they own and from which they gain both security and identity. It is something with which they are so familiar, knowing all its uses, potentialities and powers and, knowing more about it than others, it gives them power and, therefore, protection. These 'weapons', as Lohorung told me, are also their source of strength. A woman's 'weapon', for example, is cotton, her weaving shuttle and sickle, a man's, his kukri knife and bow and arrow. The forest is *Chawatangma's* weapon. 'Flowers', *bung*, are for another ancestor *waya warema* what particular trees or types of bamboo are for other *sammang*. They told me mine was my pen. For the 'house ancestor' *Khimpie* it is the largest kind of bamboo called *sakbaphu* (*Tama bans* in Nepali), one of the most important components of house building. The ritual shrine for *Chawatangma* is a model of what she likes best – the shelter in the forest using trees, which are her 'weapons', the thick millet beer, the lentils and soya beans which she used to grow as well as the chickens. It is also a model for relating to and pleasing the ancestor who created the natural order and is still part of the wild.

#### A RITUAL OF A SHAMAN

Rituals of the *mangpa* are often performed on the verandah and in the yard of a household, in the public sphere. Those of the *yatangpa* are performed either far away from the house or inside the house in spaces that are 'closed' from the rest of the community. The more public rituals of the shaman have a different atmosphere to those performed by the *yatangpa*. Watching the shaman from Rawa Khola was like watching an all night-long performance of mime and pantomime, of laughter, dancing, drumming and buffoonery. The audience watched and responded to the theatrical acts, the ritual actions and demands of the shaman. The seriousness of the healing process was almost incidental to the theatricality of the performance. From the beginning there was laughter on the verandah of the house of a villager named Tara Bahadur. It was already dark when they started preparing the shrine (*thān*) against the wall of the verandah. The shrine had been laid out by Tara Bahadur (see fig 7.5).

Eight small leaf plates; three large leaf plates with money and uncooked rice in them; a pitcher of water with a piece of ginger and five peisa piece inside, and branches of three trees – *komphu* (N. *kahula*), *waiphu* (N. *musure katu*) and *suphu* (N. *sal*, *Castanopsis tribuloides*). The water, the ginger, the money, the rice and the tree branches are at this point the main tools of the *mangpa*. Lohorung talk of them as being the 'weapons', *silli*, the powerful instruments to make things happen. The reality of the power of the primeval ancestors and the myths about them are again represented symbolically in these tools. The tools not only have to change the mood of the ancestors and gods called and thereby the well-being of the household, but also that of the patient, who is a microcosm of the household.

The performance went on all night with numerous diagnoses and curative rites. Only a brief description of one small section of the activities will be given here. The

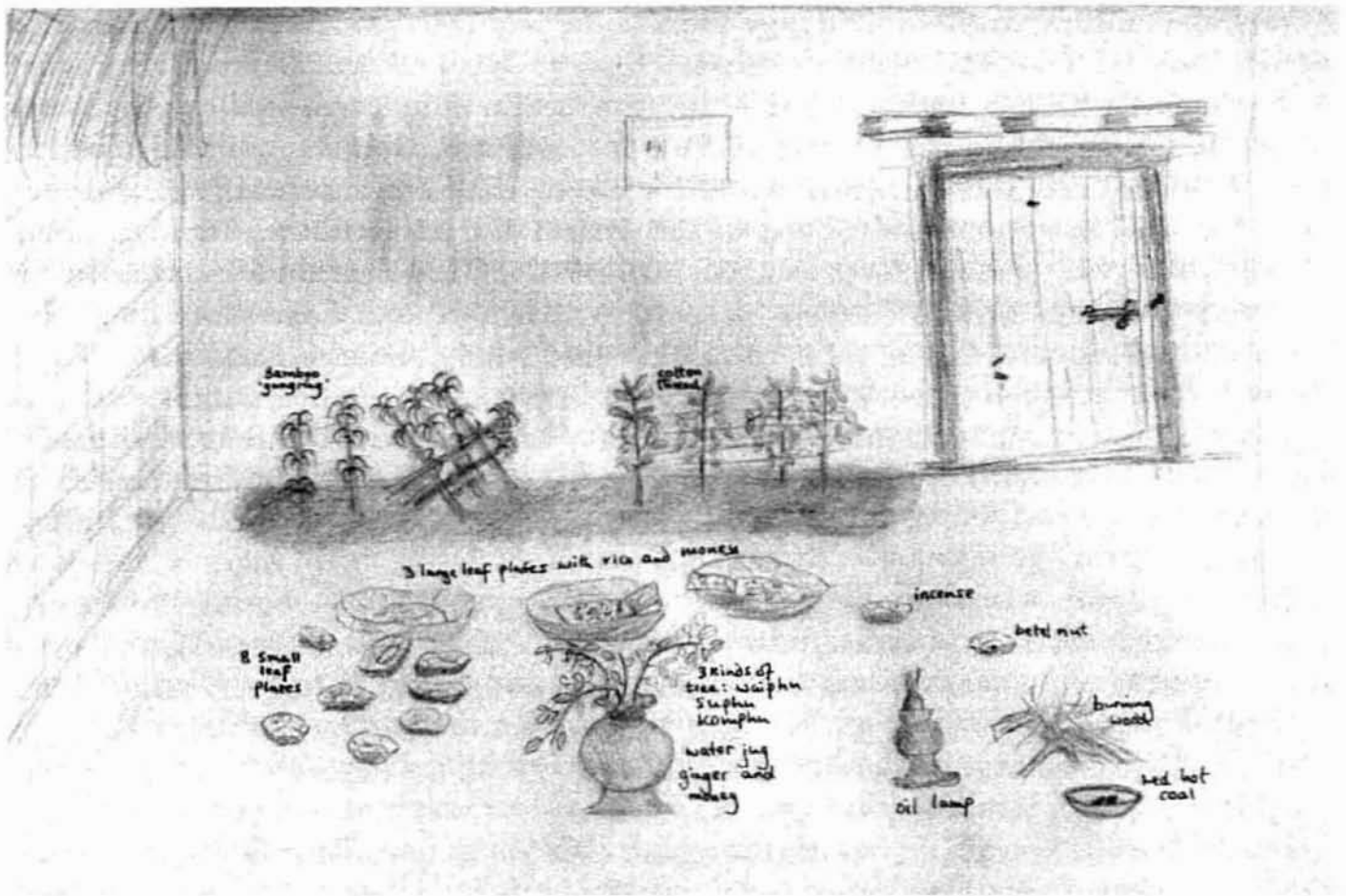


Figure 7.5. The ritual objects.

youngest member of the household had been ill and firstly the *mangpa* decided to raise her links with the ancestors by raising her *saya*. He put some ginger in each plate containing rice, took a bundle of *semphu* leaves in his hand and put a knob of ginger in his shirt for protection and then waived the bowl of burning incense around his body. He threw some rice at both sides of the metal plate, put more incense on the fire and, folding his hands together, began to pray to his *guru* master spirits; he began to shake a bit and started to dance, playing one of the copper plates like a drum. Trembling increasingly, he took two bundles of leaves in each hand, shook the house door, put some water in his mouth and shoved one of the bamboo *gungring* in his mouth followed by a lighted piece of rolled cotton to reach communion with his master spirits. The *Sansari mai*, the pan-Nepali divinities responsible for epidemics, had to be reached and the path had been laid out for them in the form of the cotton wound around the pitcher of water and two bamboo *gungring* tied together. He put ash on his forehead to assist their arrival and played himself into a trance, using the metal plate as a drum, stopping occasionally to drink beer from the *tongba* bamboo vessel, now calling on *Dache Lama*, a Tibetan divinity. When the spirit came to the shaman he started trembling more. Finally, with assistance from one helper who held up high the *tongba* on one side of the *mangpa*, and another on the other side holding up high the water and branches of trees, the three hopped and danced around the

verandah shouting in ritual language to raise the youngest daughter's *saya*, her vital spirit, her connections with the ancestors.

The *mangpa* tucked *semplu* into his trousers and became possessed briefly by the ancestor of a neighbouring Rai group. It is important for the *mangpa* to protect his body with ginger and branches of protective leaves. Illnesses, according to Lohorung, are often the attachment to the body of the desires and anger of ancestors or spirits. Unless protected, shaman or priest may absorb their anger and suffer in turn the bellyaches, cramps or diarrhoea, which are evidence of angry ancestors or jealous witches. This vulnerability of humans makes sense where bodies are not 'bounded' in the way they are often viewed in the West, but viewed as being open to the emotions of others. The ancestors themselves do not penetrate the body, but their desires and emotions can. Preventive rituals can build up the strength of the boundaries of the body and pacify possible negative emotions by pleasing ancestors with the right kind of hospitality.

Divining again – this time with leaves – the *mangpa* sliced the bundles of *komplu* and *waiphu* (trees used in house building and associated with ancestors). The more leaves fall the right way up the more likely the household is to be healthy. What should be noted here is that the *mangpa* divined not for one individual but for the whole family. The household, rather than the individual, is a key unit in relations with the ancestors and, therefore, in restoring health when they are seen as the cause. At times it is not the household but the lineage or clan that is the significant unit and rites are done accordingly. Divination can foretell whether a household will have good fortune and well-being depending whether the majority of leaves fall right side up or upside down. To appreciate this we have to remember the reality of a connection between leaves (or trees) and ancestors. There is a relational connection going back to mythical times: the intuition that humans have lost is retained by the metaphysical connection between the shaman and the divining objects, the ginger or the leaves. The ginger and the leaves have *saya*, that vital energy which links them to the ancestral world.

The ritual to raise the *saya* of the head of the household required two bamboo containers (*tongpa*) full of matured and fermented millet, and two gourds containing the strong, thin beer which is squeezed from similar millet; one *mana* of husked rice grown in one's own fields; one crowing cock; ginger; a turban, which is tied around the head of the person whose *saya* needs raising; and a kukri knife placed in the same person's hand. The elders of the village sat to the left and the right of the 'sick' person and in a small earthen oil lamp some *siwali* (a water plant, *Blyxa octandra*) or *titepāti* (*Artemisia vulgaris*) flowers were placed before the lamp was lit. The lamp was placed on top of the husked rice. The *mangpa* took the cock under his right arm, and began to shake a little as he recited. The elders joined in at the end.

O raise the *saya* of this *kechaba* of the *lamarwa* spring. If an enemy has lowered his *saya*, if his father, mother, wife, children, brothers or sisters, have lowered his *saya*, today you raise it; on the right and on the left we elders are sitting so you raise his *saya*; from today make his *saya* strong and walk close to your enemies, make them wander and run away.



As the *mangpa* said *mechirayo meruku*, the assistant killed the cock by striking it on its back with a stick and, as the drops of blood came out, everyone shouted, '*saya* has been raised!' (*saya pogayo!*). Everyone present then had to jump up and make the 'patient' jump up as well, shouting very loudly as they did so. Again, the shaman examined the chicken's blood to foresee the fortune of the family. If no blood comes from the mouth, but instead water from the eyes or nose, the rite has failed and the patient remains demoralised. This time there was just a drop of blood from the chicken.

We have already seen the significance of the blood of pigs and chickens in the ancestral rituals of the *yatangpa*. The ritual tradition that symbolically links blood with the good state of *saya*, links blood with the ancestors and with success, prosperity and a healthy life is powerful in the rituals of both officiants. As Allen says about the neighbouring Thulung Rai 'the health and fortune of an individual Thulung and his relationship to his ancestors are fused in a single concept ... health is only an aspect of a concept of good order which embraces the properly cooperative ancestors' (1976b, 510). Good health for Lohorung is certainly social as well as physical, but the necessary sociality and hospitality must be directed as much to superhuman beings as to living neighbours. The loss of connections and the lowering of *saya*, whether brought about by insult or ill-health, leads to a demoralized condition which can be cured with the rite as described above. Central to Lohorung understanding of illness and health lies in the connection with founding ancestors, who established the harmonious good order upon which all their traditions are derived, and in the concept of *saya*, the 'ancestors within' or 'ancestral spirit'. Without the medicinal tools of trees, beer, pigs and chickens the rituals to re-connect with the ancestral world could not be performed. Moreover, unless those involved in the ritual show the necessary respect to the medicinal tools, the rite could not work. In this sense it is the attitude of those involved which creates their power. We have seen how everything that has *saya* belongs in reality to the ancestral world and must be viewed with the reality that existed at that time. Then, trees, plants and animals could communicate with ancestors. In rituals they should still be treated in the same way 'as if' communication was possible, respecting their own unique power and value, their own way of being in the world, and within the appropriate framework. Outside of the ritual space no such metaphysical attitude is required.

Everyone, both man and ancestor, needs high *saya* for well being, and from the very beginning of the order of the world the force of vitality could be conveyed to ancestors and balance restored simply on the sight of a drop of blood. The transmissibility of substances, qualities and emotions are apparent in Nepali ideas of the body and can be compared to early Western ideas about the power of the witch to invade the confines of the body. 'Witchcraft was, among other things, a form of power which involved exchanges between bodies' (Purkiss 1996, 119). In Nepal the jealous evil eye of the witch can invade the body and bring about acute diarrhoea in their victim. Whereas in early modern England the power of the boundless and formless female body was threatening and its spillage serious because there was an ideal of a more solid, whole and bounded body, among the Kiranti there is no such cultural construction. The Lohorung notion of person, male and female, is not a fixed, bounded entity but more like that of the Hindu idea in which it is 'permeable, composite, partly

divisible, and transmissible. Processes internal to the person are ... continuous with processes of exchange between and among persons' (Marriott 1976, 194). Transmissibility of substances and emotions is inevitable. The anger of *khimpie*, the house ancestor, is not just a feeling, but can communicate through the unbound body in the form of paralysis or wounds. In a similar way the quality of the drop of blood is transmitted to *sammang*. The force of the blood can enter the bodies of the ancestors as easily as blood is spilled. Whether from a chicken or a pig, just a drop is enough to raise the vital connections between living and *sammang*, to raise the source of energy, courage, and self-respect so that balance is restored to the order of the world.

## INTERPRETATION

So far I have mainly discussed the Lohorung's own attitudes to health and illness and their understanding of how their 'medicinal' tools work, though for the purposes of this paper I have used biomedical terminology ('medicinal tools', 'doctor', 'surgical setting', 'health management'). I would like to consider here the effectiveness of these tools using non-indigenous criteria. A clear distinction should be made between the rituals of the *yatangpa* priest and those of the *mangpa* shaman. In the former there is no performance, no interaction between the audience and the officiant, and the focus remains directed at the ancestor in question. The efficacy of the rituals of the priest lies in part in the way in which the superhuman world is given a powerful material presence in the forms of the shrines to which each ancestor or spirit is enticed. Each of these shrines, as a medical tool, represents a powerful material presence, a material object to assist the patient's ability to visualise their 'journey to health'. In each ritual the patient knows that the shaman or priest is going into a trance state and undertaking a mystical journey for them, specifically addressing their illness and the mood of the ancestor. The way that the rituals are structured means that, even if the language used in the rituals is not totally understood, the very notion of the journey and the special mood of the event must bring about in the patient some experience of a process taking place. The medical tools, the erected house shrines and offerings act to mediate between the personal experience and a highly charged social meaning. Most important, the moment of sacrifice, the moment of divination from the blood, is seen as a renewal. As I mentioned above, just a drop is enough to raise the vital connections between living and *sammang*, to raise the source of energy, courage, and self-respect. Lohorung can see the drop and understand the meaning. It is common knowledge that blood is an indication of fertility, health and prosperity and the drop can evoke a visualisation of that curative moment, a revitalisation from a demoralised state, in a most dramatic way. This is not so far from our own experiences of recovery. Western medical anthropologists talk about 'journeys to recovery' and the importance of 'domains of significance' for a cure to take place. For example, Mattingley (2000) tells the story of the actor Oliver Sacks, recovering from a leg injury and infuriated by the medical expression 'uneventful recovery'.

'What damned nonsense! Recovery ... was a 'pilgrimage', a journey in which one moved, if one moved, stage by stage, or by stations. Every stage, every



station, was a completely new advent, requiring a new start, a new birth or beginning. One had to begin, to be born again and again. Recovery was an exercise in nothing short of birth ... unexpected, unexpectable, incalculable and surprising. Recovery uneventful? It *consists of events*' (2000, 206).

Mattingley comments how many patients and healers may agree that 'recovery *'consists of events'* ... [with] powerful motives to transform therapy time into a domain of significance, one that acquires phenomenological weight because it creates a present which is threefold, which embodies connections to past and, especially, to future' (2000, 206).

For Lohorung the sight of the trees, shaped to house a particular *sammang* ancestor, and the beer laid out with the other offerings, along with the sound of the ritual language, may act as a reassuring sign that the ancestor causing pain has been contacted. The shrine heightens the visualisation of the presence of the ancestors and the journey to recovery, while the sacrifice of the pig or chickens reinforces the absolute significance of the event for the patient.

Desjarlais (1992) has argued against intellectualist and symbolist approaches to understanding healing rituals in Nepal, whereas I would consider the possibility of both in understanding Lohorung medical tools. From the symbolist point of view the tools can work by 'provoking transformations of the worldview' of a patient, for example, watching the sacrifice of the pig or chicken, or experiencing the rite to raise their own *saya*. The symbols fire the imagination and the emotions so that they become personal experience; the invisible world is made manifest and the patient placed within that reality; the reality of this world becomes enmeshed with that of the 'other world'. The symbolic category of *saya*, which in part may define the experience of the patient, transforms from low to high in the process of the ritual entwining of realities. Desjarlais argues that though 'transformation of experience' is part of the answer (1992, 208); the rite works because the shaman 'changes how a body feels by altering what it feels. [The] cacophany of music, taste, sight, touch, and kinesthesia activates a patient's senses. This activation has the potential to 'wake' a person, alter the sensory grounds of a spiritless body and change how a body feels. A successful soul-calling rite recreates the sense of 'presence' intrinsic to Yolmo experiences of well-being' (Desjarlais 1992, 206). My own feeling is to allow for the possibility of any of these working, as well as other reasons to do with catharsis, externalisation of problems, and resolution of social conflict. Though scorned by many in the medical profession, the placebo effect is one of the most powerful tools in Lohorung medicine to trigger the body's ability to heal itself.

In adopting an intellectualist approach to the medical tools, I would argue that they may well encourage patients to think differently about their condition; they may, for example, rekindle hope by seeing that effective and appropriate action has been taken. After all, the practices in rituals are rational as well as visual or 'symbolic'. Given the essentially human or anthropomorphic view of ancestors that the Lohorung hold, we cannot understand Lohorung statements about *sammang* and the kinds of trees they need to build their houses, statements about *sammang* and their 'hunger', simply as symbolic statements. Undoubtedly, their rituals include symbolic action. The shrines are, as we have seen, symbolic representations of their houses, there are numerous



symbolic or mimetic qualities to the enactment of past events performed by the *mangpa*, and the sacrificial chicken or pig is symbolic. But the activity is instrumental and pragmatic and should be effective given the framework within which they understand illness. The medical tools are empowered with the vital substance of *saya*, enabling communication with ancestors and facilitating a return to a stable relationship. The *yatangpa*, *mangpa*, and participants perform the ritual because their knowledge of the *sammang* and the symptoms of the person indicate to them that relations with a particular *sammang* have become unbalanced. Experience and divination tell them that this person's acute pain and dizziness is an indication that (for example) *Pappamamma'chi* are enraged. Given the web of reciprocal obligations upon which their relationship with their ancestors is based, given their knowledge of the mythical sacrificial model and given their understanding of the nature of ancestors' lives in the past, their needs and desires are not really different from their own. For the patient attending any ritual and for those performing it, there is inevitably some intellectual expectation that each ritual will be effective. Lohorung do not carry out their curative rituals expecting them to fail! Moreover, evidence certainly suggested that patients came away thinking differently about their condition. Whether in the West or in Nepal we are all involved in a system of belief. As Thomas (1971, 800) points out,

The modern working-class woman who remarks that she doesn't believe in doctors is acknowledging the fact that the patient still brings with him an essentially uninformed allegiance. Usually he knows no more of the underlying rationale for his treatment than did the client of the cunning man. In such circumstances it is hard to say where 'science' stops and 'magic' begins.

Sometimes cures do not happen and Lohorung can understand why. Mistakes are made. The paralysis may indicate that *Khimpie* is responsible when, in fact, it is *Chawatangma* playing tricks trying to look like a *Khimpie* paralysis. Diagnosis goes wrong, but there is always a reason, whether based on the complicity of the *sammang* to mislead the *yatangpa*, the inability of the *yatangpa* that day to 'see', or some mishap leading to an incorrect performance. When diagnosing they say, 'It is *Khimpie*' or '*Chawatangma* is hungry' or 'she is angry' or 'the mind of *pappamamma* hurts, we must raise their *saya*'. They know *sammang* have mind (*niwa*) from the evidence that they 'feel' and have 'wants'. The word they use for the desires of the superhuman beings is *luchakmi*. The human equivalent is '*minchakmi*', with much the same meaning: 'wanting to do/eat something', 'to feel like something', 'to feel ...'. *Sammang*, however, 'feel' and 'want' (*luchakmi*) in a more selfish, dramatic way than adult human beings. They compare the wants or possessiveness of the *sammang* with those of children in their sudden intensity, using this to explain the sudden onset of certain illnesses. The rituals can only work if they satisfy the *sammang*. If they are performed incorrectly the pain simply redoubles.

I argue here against the view that rituals for Lohorung are essentially expressive and crucially different from 'practical' action in the way classically suggested by Beattie (1966). Rituals are, of course, 'showing' and 'saying' in all kinds of expressive ways exactly what the ritual is enacting. But what the ritual actually did and meant to

the participants, I found was based on firm notions about how ancestors and humans behave, how they respond to coercive offerings, how anger can be counteracted with satisfying food, and how *saya* rises when compensations ease the insult. Once *sammang* have been satisfied, Western medicines will bring the most speedy cure in humans. The focus in the ritual was always on bringing about a change in the feelings of *sammang* and as a consequence restoring the relationship between humans and ancestors. Illness associated with *sammang* was always understood as requiring a restoration of the balance between the living and the ancestors by raising *saya*. As with pregnancy, one cannot be 'a little bit ill from *sammang*'. If *sammang* are involved, the relationship has to be addressed but once that has been done it is recognized that Western medicine can sometimes be very effective in dealing with other levels of the illness. Without initial ritual sacrifices, however, the Western medicines cannot work. Some did, however, say that taking Western medicines could be dangerous if it increased the anger of the *sammang* involved. Whether the practices of the priest or those of the shaman are to be considered their efficacy was not to be found in their social status. According to my own informants it had to do with each household's trust in the 'trueness' of the officiant's relations with the spiritual world, and inevitably people's opinions differed. The intuitive experience of one household led them to place their trust in the *mangmani*, that of another in the local *yatangpa* and another in the wild Rawa Khole *Mangpa*. In this sense the role of material tools in the healing process is supportive: as elements in the ritual action, however, they are crucial.

## CONCLUSIONS

The unquestioned efficacy of biomedicine and the Cartesian mind-body split was rejected early on in the natural childbirth movement by Balaskas (1983), and more generally by Illich (1974) and others in alternative/complementary medicine. This was followed by medical anthropologists and sociologists demonstrating the need for a more cross-cultural approach (e.g. Helman 1984) and an approach which included the importance of locating the patient in a social and personal environment (e.g. Turner [1987] 1995). What I have tried to show in this paper is that in some cultures, such as that of the Lohorung Rai in East Nepal, there is an approach to the nature of human life in the world which differs from these views and demonstrates a more social and relational view of the body, accepting as it does crucial links between natural, spiritual and human existences. Integral to their understanding of health and illness, is the view that well-being is dependent on respectful relationships with the living, with the ancestors and with the world that is seen as belonging to them. Illness and misfortune are indications of the problems that inevitably occur given the tangled way in which natural, spiritual and human existences interpenetrate. Although in the West the importance of human relationships in health is increasingly explored, the notion of the significance of spiritual relations or bonds with natural phenomena are still paid little attention.

One further point emerges from this paper which is the focus the Rai healing rituals give to the experience of demoralisation or depression. A common side effect of illness

and suffering found all over the world is the feeling of dejection, dispiritedness, melancholy or despair, particularly in severe or chronic illness, disfiguring radical surgery, physical disabilities, illnesses connected to moral issues (such as AIDS, alcoholism), in mental illness connected to unemployment or defeating work situations, in illness preventing functioning in the community, leprosy – the list has only just begun. As Kleinman says (1988, xiv) 'one of the unintended outcomes of the modern transformation of the medical care system is that it does just about everything to drive the practitioner's attention away from the experience of illness.' In spite of some improvements in this area since the 80s, it is still the case that the despair and demoralisation experienced by patients may well be given insufficient attention. In contrast, dealing with demoralisation is central to Lohorung healing rituals. According to their view of the person each individual inevitably loses vitality, self-esteem and experiences the fall of *saya* when suffering from the attack of any ancestor. This expresses itself in lack of sociability, and sometimes even alienation from cultural values. In the Lohorung understanding of being human each person and every household needs to keep alive their relationship with their community and the ancestors and creators, who lie at the core of their indigenous traditions. This is the only way to control feelings of distress, demoralisation and despair, which can lead to death. The importance of this is reflected in the way that relationships are institutionalised in the concept of *saya*, a spiritual presence in the body. It is also reflected in the way that all Lohorung indigenous rituals are concerned to restore the key relationship with *sammang* ancestors and raise *saya*. This restores a sense of self esteem and vitality which disappears when the relationship is broken. Loss of vitality or demoralisation are both evidence of, and a condition for, ill health. For Lohorung, restoration of health primarily involves dealing with demoralisation. The beer, trees, pigs and chickens assist as much in raising the *saya* of the patient as they do in pleasing and controlling and raising the *saya* of the ancestors. The problem for the archaeologist must be that the 'cleverness' of the 'medicinal tools' and the power of the places in which the rituals are performed is only maintained so long as there are the priests and shamans to re-enact the scenes of the primeval past. Apart from any chicken bones not scavenged by hyenas there will be no physical traces left for posterity.

### Notes

- 1 Most of the ethnographic data here was collected in roughly 30 months fieldwork (1976 to 1980) that was funded by the Social Science Research Council and the American Association of University Women. There has been a brief visit since but most subsequent contact has been maintained with written communications with two key informants.
- 2 Lohorung Rai, speaking a Tibeto-Burman language, live in Eastern Nepal to the south of Mount Makalu. Although much of the material for this paper refers to one group, the Lohorung Rai, similar attitudes to illness exist throughout East Nepal amongst other Rai and Limbu groups, collectively known as Kiranti. In terms of general culture Rai and Limbu are close. The Kiranti are sedentary agriculturalists, subsistence farmers, growing rice, maize and millet. Lohorung live in dense villages in houses built on stilts. In the space underneath the house live the livestock, mainly pigs, chickens and goats, oxen and



water buffalo. Unlike their Hindu neighbours few Lohorung can afford tea and prefer to drink liquor, mainly beer of various kinds and strength, hence the Nepali term for them of *matwali*, people belonging to a class of Alcohol Drinkers, making them ritually inferior.

- 3 For a detailed discussion of how this attitude is embedded in Lohorung notions of self and emotion see Hardman 2000.
- 4 Indigenous terms in the text followed by N. are Nepali; all other indigenous terms are Lohorung.

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