

GUARDIANS OF THE ROYAL GODDESS : DAITYA AND KUMAR AS THE PROTECTORS OF TALEJU BHAVANI OF KATHMANDU

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Introduction

On the seventh day of the great Dasain festival (Sept-Oct.) the images of the royal goddess Taleju Bhavānī of Kathmandu are taken down from their lofty position in the Taleju temple overlooking the ancient palace compound of Hanuman Dhoka. The goddess is brought to a room of worship at the back of Mulchowk, a courtyard which is distantly facing the stairs leading up to the temple. In there, special rites and sacrifices are performed over the next three days. The journey of Taleju is a short one, not comparable to the lavish processions (*yātrā*) of various other divinities of Kathmandu. On their way down to the special room of worship, Taleju's Pūjā Kothā, the four images or emblems representing the goddess are covered with shiny cloth (*New:tas*). The doors of the Pūjā Kothā are closed behind the small procession of priests carrying the covered images. Taleju will be just as secluded from the public eye in Mulchowk as she was in her higher temple abode. On the great ninth (Mahānavamī) of the ten Dasain days, the only day of the year that the general public is allowed to circumambulate the sanctum of the Taleju temple, the images of Taleju herself are behind the closed doors of the Pūjā Kothā in Mulchowk. For the occasion, the procession image of Guhyeśvarī, also kept in the Taleju temple, is shown to the public at the Southern gate to the sanctum.

In principle, only those Karmācārya and Jośī (non-Brahmin castes of Hindu ritual specialists) who by hereditary right perform Taleju's daily worship are granted a *darśana*, a sight of the goddess who since Malla times is the main *śakti* (lit: power) of the realm. However secret the rites are kept and however powerful the goddess remains, a gradual decline of the Taleju cult in Kathmandu is undeniable. Once a year it is given grandeur by the official fanfare of Mahāsaptamī, the seventh day of Dasain. At that time the king of Nepal visits Mulchowk to view the *Phulpāti* (a canopy containing flowers) brought from the Taleju temple in Gorkha, the town of origin of the present

dynasty. The *phulpāti* from Gorkha has its own special room, known as Dasain Ghar, in the courtyard adjoining Mulchowk (Nāg Pokharī). The king also receives *prasāda* (blessed items, i.c. flowers) from Taleju Bhavānī of Kathmandu through the main priest (New.: *mū ācāḥju*) without having a *darsāna* himself. As for the higher castes connected with the ancient Malla court, which are still mentioned by Pradhan (1986: 311) as partaking in the *khadga yātrā*, the sword procession on the final night of Dasain, they did no longer appear in 1992. Some of the temple officiants and one gazetted officer holding the (covered) royal sword were the only sword-carriers on an occasion which once marked the glorious war path of both the goddess and the king. Several Jyāpu (Farmers) who also have to play key roles in the final ceremony threatened to leave the scene after an assiduous and probably better remunerated army guard at first denied them entrance on their arrival at Hanuman Dhoka.

That the *khadga yātrā* nevertheless remains an impressive event is in no small measure due to the graceful presence of the dancers embodying Daitya and Kumār together with their respective musical bands. Apart from their presence in the sword procession, Daitya and Kumār make their only appearances in Mahāsaptamī morning, when the images of Taleju are brought down from the temple, and in Vijayā Daśamī morning, when Taleju is brought up again. Both dancers are boys who at the time of their selection for a 5 year period must be between 8 and 15 years old. Daitya has to belong to the Śākya (Goldsmith) community of Kvane, the Lower town of Kathmandu, Kumār to the Tulādhar (Merchant) community of Thane, the Upper town of Kathmandu. If the timing is accurate, the two deified boys for a short while share a single stage inside the palace compound of Hanuman Dhoka on the Mahāsaptamī (7th) and Vijayā Daśamī (10th) mornings of Dasain. They do not form an ensemble, however. When embodying the divinities the two boys are kept strictly separate, and, incidentally, the two of them never met in ordinary life either.

The embodiment of divinities by children or even infants is not unusual in Nepal; the goddess Taleju herself is embodied by the royal Kumārī (Allen 1975), the girl-child who receives the greater part of the popular worship to the goddess. Remarkably enough Daitya and Kumār are to protect the goddess Taleju herself, the central Śakti (lit: power) of the realm, from dangers that apparently may threaten her. The Kumār dancer of the Upper town (Thane) has to protect Taleju from dangers originating in heaven, and he is thereto equipped with a bow and arrow. The Daitya dancer of the Lower town (Kvane) has to protect the goddess from dangers on earth and from the netherworld and is thereto equipped with a dagger.

The Protection of the Protective Goddess

The powerful Taleju Bhavānī thus appears to need protectors (*rakṣak*) at the critical moments of transition, those of descending and ascending her temple abode. Again, it is not unusual for goddesses to have male attendants, most often Bhairava and Gaṇeśa. The latter two also appear as deified children who precede Kumārī in her charriot procession, a configuration which comes closest to a parallel with Daitya and Kumār watching over the movements of Taleju herself. The explicit protective function of Daitya and Kumār, however, distinguishes them from the more common attendants or companions of the Goddess. Equally remarkable is the distinction between the two protectors themselves. Both of them have a martial character, but while Kumār is a god, and is commonly considered a son of the Goddess, Daitya is a demon, an enemy of the gods and particularly of the Goddess herself. In several of the great divine dances of Kathmandu, such as the Bhadrakālī pyākhaṁ (Van den Hoek 1994) and Naradevī pyākhaṁ (Pradhan 1986:348,349), Daitya is the prototypical enemy of Goddess and is, ultimately, always defeated by her. Various other dances of the valley also express the same theme: the only reason for Daitya to exist, it seems, is to be killed by the Goddess, just as, conversely, and more in accordance with the textual sources, the Goddess herself was brought into being to defeat the demon enemies of the gods.

A general description of the festival of Dasain (also called Durgā Pūjā, or in Newari, Mohanī) is given by Pradhan (1986) in his dissertation on the domestic and cosmic rituals of the Hindu Newars of Kathmandu. Interestingly, Pradhan divides the cosmic rituals of the Newar into those situated on the positive pole of the sacred and those situated on the negative pole of the sacred. Needless to say, Dasain, which celebrates the victory of the Goddess over her demon adversary, is placed under the heading "The positive pole of the sacred...". This chapter describes in passing also the Pacalī Bhairava festival, which takes place during Dasain, and the Indrāyaṇī festival, celebrated nearly two months later. The festivals of Pacalī Bhairava's counterparts and of Indrāyaṇī's sister-goddesses, however, are relegated to the next chapter on "The negative pole of the sacred...", indicating the difficulty inherent to this kind of classification.

In just four sentences Pradhan makes mention of the subject of the present article, the performance of Kumār and Daitya during Dasain (1968:309). Brief but accurate, Pradhan's account passes over the apparent anomaly that Daitya is staged in this context to protect the Goddess who gloriously defeats him in the overall pattern of Dasain. A telling Newari poem, which for unclear reasons is inserted in the chapter on the negative pole of the sacred, praises the victory of the Goddess in the most vivid terms. Since the poem has been

translated by Lienhardt (1974:144-145) and already quoted by Slusser (1982:333), it is sufficient here to revoke the last sentence: "You (i.e., the goddess Kālī) are red with blood through the blood-drops of the youthful body of your enemy, the Daitya (quoted in Pradhan 1986:319). The incongruity of the young Daitya protecting Taleju during Dasain goes simply unnoticed. Elsewhere, when treating the sources (1986:370-373) relevant to Dasain or Durgā Pūjā, the Devī Māhātmya in particular, Pradhan proves to be not insensitive to the ambiguities expressed there.

Whether the goddess is called Devī, Durgā, Kālī or Taleju, and her demon opponent Daitya, Mahiṣāsura or Caṇḍa, there is always the strange combination of animosity and mutual attraction between the two opposed parties. Both the textual sources and the present-day conceptions leave no doubt that the demon adversary, most often called Mahiṣāsura or Daitya, is at the same time an ardent devotee of Lord Śiva and an admirer, if not a lover, of the Goddess herself. The killing of Daitya in the Naradevī dances of Kathmandu is most tellingly preceded by an intimate courtship of the demon and the Goddess who kills him. This intriguing matter has been discussed by others quoted in Pradhan (e.g., Biardeau 1984) and more recently by the present writers (Van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992:72,73). Indications are that the riddle is intentional and does not have an instant solution. In trying to disentangle the positive from the negative pole of the sacred, Pradhan separates for himself what is clearly fused in his evidence, and by doing so, he unwillingly demonstrates the sheer impossibility of dividing up the sacred.

Yet the attempt is challenging and deserves further discussion because it touches upon a fundamental issue. All so-called victories of good over evil or their re-enactments, whether in Dasain, Indra Yātrā, Gathā Mugaḥ or any other of Nepal's victorious yātrās, entail the problem of defining the "good". Similarly, all explanations of those festivals in terms of a re-establishment or reinforcement of "order" ignore the obvious disorder which is displayed on those occasions. The *rakṣasa* (demon) Gathā Mugaḥ, who is annually expelled from the city in the first festival after the rice-planting season is, at a slightly more hidden level, the hero of the event (Sayami 1980:5). Conversely, in the next festival of Indra Yātrā, the king of the gods appears as a prisoner in his own festival, encaged or bound to the poles which are apparently erected in his honour (Van den Hoek 1992) and which are viewed by most observers as a cosmic confirmation of the royal order. Likewise, and even more so, Dasain is generally considered to express the ultimate victory of order and virtue over disorder and malice, and again, as representing the solid enforcement of the social structure with the king at its apex. The descent of the royal goddess, the numerous sacrifices made to her and the

violent sight of the *khadga yātrā* are in that way seen as a conclusion, the end of the affair rather than the start of a new and dangerous episode.

The appearance of Daitya and Kumār in order to protect the protective Goddess displays just one of the dissonances in the festival of victory, but a telling one. Apart from Pradhan only Todd Lewis (1984), in his dissertation on the Tulādhār of Kathmandu makes mention of the dance of Kumār and Daitya. Lewis devotes two pages (1984:389-391) to the subject, but his account shows all the limitations of a one-caste, one-locality approach. It is inaccurate on quite a few points, including the identity of Daitya, the Śākya counterpart of the Tulādhār Kumār. The identity of Daitya, which is taken for granted by Pradhan and mistaken for Gaṇeśa by Lewis, thus remains puzzling.

At a closer view, Kumār, in the given context, carries with him a riddle of his own. Belonging to the world of the gods, and being a well-known demon-slayer like the goddess herself, Kumār's energies as protector of Taleju are directed against *ākāśa* (the sky), the abode of the gods. The whole configuration thus appears to be a reversal of the established one. On the given occasions Daitya has to ward off the dangers originating from the world of which he himself is the protagonist: the demonic realm. Kumār, on the other hand, has to protect the goddess against dangers springing from the heavenly realm – to which the two of them are held to belong themselves. The performance of Daitya and Kumār, it is clear, does not fit the pattern of the all-victorious goddess who re-establishes the divine supremacy. The functions of Kumār and Daitya suggest that Taleju, in her advance, must fear obstruction from all three worlds: heaven, earth and the underworld. How are the protectors, the young Tulādhār and Śākya boys, supposed to cope with threats that cannot be met by the goddess Taleju herself? As will be seen the two boys are elaborately prepared, but the relation between their training and their principal performance is far from transparent.

The Social Setting: The Tulādhār and Śākya Khalah

Both Daitya and Kumār are selected by lot among the eligible boys (between 8 and 15 years old, with no defects) of the Kvane Śākya and Thane Tulādhār *khalah* (New.: "families", communities). In both cases all local members are involved: There is no *guthi* within either of the communities that has the more specific task of organising the Kumār or Daitya *pyākham* (New.: dance performance). With regard to the special relationship between the merchant community and the cult of the royal family, Lewis argues that, by dancing in the role of a god who protects the goddess who guards the security of the kingdom, the Urāy (the high Buddhist castes of merchants and artisans) express their alliance with royal power while, in return, the king

acknowledges the traders' singular high standing in society. "It is telling", Lewis adds in a footnote without source and explanation, "that in Rana times the relationship broke down so that the military had to intervene on several occasions to enforce the Urāy community's participation" (Lewis 1986:391).

As it is, not all members of Tulādhar and Śākya caste are obliged to participate. The Tulādhar of Kathmandu all live in the Upper city (Thane) but are divided between two quarters: Neta and Asan. Only the Tulādhar of Asan participate in the Kumār pyākhaṁ. The Śākya are divided into a Thane and Kvane population, and only the Śākya of Ombahāl in Kvane participate in the Daitya pyākhaṁ. The caste distinction is generally considered subordinate to the spatial and cosmic opposition between the two parties. Kumār represents the Upper town and Daitya the Lower town in a way analogous to their respective tasks: protection against the evil forces from heaven, and protection against the evil forces from the earth and underworld. As is so often the case, a socioeconomic explanation like the one given by Lewis may be quite true or even obvious, but it does not illuminate the particulars of the ritual proceedings themselves.

In both the Kumār and the Daitya case, an assembly of elders (New.: *nāyo*) supervises the ceremonies. Remarkably, they are at least nominally appointed by a particular government office, the Rāṣṭriya Abhilekhālaya or National Archives. The Śākya and Tulādhar *mū nāyos* (main elders) possess a *lālmohara* (royal ordinance) of King Pratap Singh Shah charging their communities with the responsibility for the Daitya and Kumār dances along with an appropriate royal compensation and remuneration. The *mū nāyos* are assisted in their task by five *khalah nāyo*, family heads, who among other things provide the different musical instruments and musicians that are to accompany Kumār and Daitya. The assembly of *nāyos* is in charge of the all-important worship of Nāśadyo, the god of music and dance. They organize the sacrifices and feasts that are essential in the yearly course of events and more particularly at the installation of a new Daitya and Kumār every five years.

To have a son selected as Daitya or Kumār is not considered an enviable lot. The boys themselves view their role with a mixture of pride and embarrassment, but for the parents it is foremost a matter of concern. Their son, and by implication, the parents, have to obey strict life rules for five years, any breach of which can lead to illness, madness or even death. Both the Śākya and the Tulādhar community collect among their members a sizeable amount of money (nowadays amounting to several ten thousands of rupees) to be given to the new incumbent at start - this in addition to the meagre sum of Rs. 500 which the dancers annually receive from the government. If the lot falls to the richer families, they may try to find an

eligible boy from a more needy family to replace their own son. At least in recent times this procedure seems to be the rule rather than exception.

The evidence to substantiate the fear that a Kumār or Daitya performer is at risk for his life or sanity is not overwhelming. It indeed happened in 1975 that a Kumār died before his term finished, because, it is said, he witnessed some transgressive behaviour of his mother. In the experience of Jogratna Vajracarya, who has for over forty years been instructing Daityas – nine successive ones to date – only one of them showed signs of insanity, and that only after his term finished. Still the cause of his disorder was attributed to not having strictly adhered to the rules of his office which, most importantly, prescribe a daily morning and evening worship of Nāsadyo. As for this ex-Daitya, his sanity could be restored through medical treatment. The statistics of course do not refute the fact that families with a Kumār or Daitya in their midst may live under constant strain.

The training of Daitya and Kumār runs about parallel. For about a month, leading up to their first Dasain performance, they are instructed by a *gubhāju* (a Vajrācārya Buddhist officiant) in their dance. For each of the *gubhājus* it is a hereditary function to be *guruju* (teacher) of the respective dancers, and both of them possess secret texts with directives, mantras and songs for the specific purpose of instructing a Daitya or Kumār. At the end of the dancers' term the *mū nāyos* have to inform the National Archives that a new lottery is to be held. Because the one untimely death of a Kumār performer in 1975 occurred just before his last dance – an event separate from the yearly Dasain performances – the terms of Daitya and Kumār also keep running parallel; both were in their third year of performance in 1992.

To avoid repetition in the description, attention will first be turned to the instruction period and the initiatory dance of Daitya. Kumār's coming into being will then be described in those aspects in which it significantly differs from Daitya's case. Information regarding the beginning and the end of the dancers' career comes from interviews with the Śākya and Tulādhār elders, the respective *gubhājus*, Kumār and Daitya themselves and finally a former Daitya and a former Kumār, all of whom are mentioned in the acknowledgements.

The Coming into being of Daitya and Kumār

The instruction and the rituals that lead up to the formation of a new Daitya every five years, should ideally start about one month before his first performance in Dasain. The actual training period, though, may depend on other circumstances, foremost of which is the readiness of a new candidate. In bygone days, the *gubhāju* (*guruju*, the teacher) of Daitya related, a *māhām* (soldier) from Hanuman Dhoka would come to catch a young Śākya boy – an

account which calls into mind Lewis' above-mentioned footnote about the enforcement of the Urāy community's participation by military means.

The present Daitya, who started in 1990, recalled that his instruction period lasted no more than eight days, which led to a condensation of the rituals required. His predecessor's training, which took over half a month, offered a clearer view of the generally required sequence of preparations. The time schedule, however, is not fixed in absolute terms. Whatever the length of the instruction period, the critical passages are determined by *jyotiṣa*, astrology, and it is the task of the gubhāju to calculate the auspicious moments. The principal moments are:

1. *kisali tayegu*, (New.), the pledge made by the chosen one on his first day.
2. *ākhā tayegu* or *dyo svanegu*, (New.), the establishment of the god Nāsadyo in the new Daitya's house, one day after the demise of the old one - determined by *jyotiṣa*.
3. *ghaṅgalā svanegu* (New.), the attachment of the jingling bracelets worn below the knees, also determined by *jyotiṣa*, but ideally about half-way through Daitya's instruction period.
4. *musi pūjā* (New.), the main *pūjā* starting on the 5th of Dasain with the worship of Nāsadyo, and continuing throughout the night and the following day up to the first public performance of Daitya on the eve of Mahāsaptamī.

The first ritual act of the boy becoming Daitya is also the most simple one: the day after being selected he goes, together with his guru, to the shrine of Nāsadyo – the god of music and dance – in Ombahāl. Almost every quarter of town has its Nāsadyo, but the particular one in Ombahāl, Padma Niteśvara, is considered to be so powerful that women (who normally perform daily worship at Nāsadyo) cannot enter the shrine. At this Nāsadyo the Daitya-to-be has to offer *kisali* (New.: a small earthen platter containing rice, an arecanut and a coin), which signifies a sacramental bond or promise. Shortly after, but dependent on an auspicious moment (*sāit*) calculated by the gubhāju, the old Daitya will, after partaking in a goat sacrifice to Nāsadyo and a sacrificial meal (New.: *sī kāḥ bhvay*), make his parting dance. The build-up of the new Daitya's sacrality starts only after the demise of the old one, his "falling off the stage", an event that will be described in section 7. The last dance of the old Daitya and the first dance of the new one are performances in their own right, and have nothing to do with the protection of the goddess Taleju.

On the day following the old Daitya's death on the stage, the god Nāsadyo will be brought to the new Daitya's house. This elaborate ceremony is

known by two names, which indicate phases of the process: *dyo s̄are yāyegu* (New.: transferring the god) and *ākhā tayegu* (New.: establishing the ākhā). Ākhā generally denotes a room dedicated to Nāsadyo and the practice of music and dance. In this specific case it refers to the temporary shrine in the house of Daitya where he is to worship Nāsadyo daily and where he receives his *mohani* (New.: soot mark on the forehead, lit. "charm") and his *makuta* (New.: divine crown) before setting out for a dance. The actual practice for the dance takes place first at his guru's house (without music) and subsequently in the courtyard of his own house (with music).

The process of transferring Nāsadyo to an ākhā or *ākhāchem* (New.: house for musical repetition) is by no means unique in itself. Nāsadyo is a divinity of great importance for the performing arts. He is as essential for the Dhimay music of the Jyāpu (Toffin 1993) and for the Gathu pyākham (Van den Hoek 1994) as he is for the Daitya pyākham, the dance of Daitya. A well-illustrated survey of the characteristics of the omnipresent Nāsadyo is given by Ter Ellingson (1990) in an article subtitled "a photo essay". Unless the ākhāchem in which the musicians or dancers exercise their art is itself a shrine of Nāsadyo – as it is in case of the in-door shrine at Vatu, where Jyāpu exercise their Dhimay and Gathu their pyākham – the god has to be transferred (*dyo s̄are yāyegu*) to the ākhāchem.

In Daitya's case the ritual procedure is that two pieces of cloth with the features of Nāsadyo – three eyes and a moustache (called Nāsadyo k̄apaḥ and painted by a member of the Citrakār, Painters caste) – are brought to the shrine of the god. The small temple in Ombahāl also contains the *aṣṭamātrkās* (the common ensemble of eight goddesses), but the two Nāsadyo k̄apaḥ are hung in front of the square recess in the middle of the back-wall, which represents Nāsadyo himself. The presence of the god is most often signified by one or three empty cavities of rectangular or triangular shape (see Ellingson 1990:238-240). After a sacrifice of one goat there, Daitya himself carries one of the two k̄apaḥ to his house. The installation of the god (New.: *dyo svanegu*) consists of putting this Nāsadyo k̄apaḥ in the room thereto reserved (New.: *ākhā tayegu*) and the sacrifice of a second goat in the newly established ākhā. That night a special *sī k̄aḥ bhvay* takes place which links the boy who is in the process of becoming Daitya with the one who finished his term the night before.

In the yearly recurrent goat sacrifices which the Sākya make to Nāsadyo in the night preceding Daitya's Dasain performance, the eight shares in the head of the sacrifice (New.: *sī*) are divided among the six *khalah nāyo*, the *gubhāju* and Daitya. The *gubhāju* receives the most prestigious part, the right eye, Daitya gets the tongue, a part which does not indicate superiority or seniority but which often signifies the locus of divine power (cf Van den Hoek and

Shrestha 1992:66 and Van den Hoek 1992:551). The head of the goat sacrificed on the eve of the old Daitya's parting dance had been divided according to this set pattern. The heads of the two goats sacrificed on the day of dyo sāre yāyegu, the transference of Nāsadyo, will by contrast provide sixteen pieces of sī, in which not only the khalah nāyo but also other members will share in order of seniority. Most significantly, one of the two tongues is still given to the old Daitya, the other to the boy who is yet to assume the Daitya identity. After establishing Nāsadyo in the ākhā, the Daitya-to-be starts taking his lessons from the gubhāju. In the period leading up to the next ceremony (New.: *ghaṁgalā svanegu*) he is only practically instructed in the movements of the dance without any accompanying music and without special dress or divine attributes.

Ghaṁgalā svanegu, the ceremony of tying his jingling bracelets (pieces of cloth set with bells, an attribute of divine dancers in general), marks an important step in Daitya's formation but is not yet the final stage of the ritual sequence. Its timing again depends on a sāit, an auspicious moment calculated by the gubhāju. Both the ghaṁgalā themselves and the musical instruments of the Pañcatāla group which accompanies Daitya's dance are brought to the Nāsadyo shrine. The ghaṁgalā are placed in the cavity of Nāsadyo himself, the musical instruments are arranged beneath on the floor. Again a pūjā including a goat sacrifice is made to Nāsadyo, after which the instruments are handed over to the musicians and the ghaṁgalā to Daitya. The instruments are carried, without being played, to Daitya's home. After taking the sī kāḥ bhvay of the sacrificed goat there, the ghaṁgalā are put on Daitya's legs by the citāyā nāyo – the only nāyo who is not associated with a musical instrument and whose special function is to decorate Daitya. The musicians take up their instruments and Daitya symbolically makes a few steps on their accompaniment. Starting from ghaṁgalā svanegu, his further training takes place in the courtyard to which his house belongs (at present Ganthinani) and is from now on accompanied by music. The teaching sessions are open only to male members of the Śākya khalah.

The next and final stage in the ritual sequence (*musi pūjā*) starts two days before Mahāsaptamī, again with a pūjā and goat sacrifice for Nāsadyo. The principal members of the Śākya khalah will spend the whole night at Nāsadyo. Daitya's final transformation starts only the following day and consists of two parts, the first of which is surprising. Dressed in a white long skirt (New.: *jāmā*) with a turban (New.: *betāli*) on his head and a wound-up cloth around his belt (New.: *jani*) – the attire of Nāsadyo himself, it is said – a third eye and a moustache are painted on his face by a Citrakār (Painter). Thereby he displays the principal features of Nāsadyo and thus makes a first dance which, strikingly, does not reflect Daitya but the god

Nāsadyo himself. After his dance he is made to walk seven steps over lotus flowers and betel nuts, which, according to the *mū nāyo*, marks his final transformation into Daitya.

In the procession to his house, however, this "Daitya" still wears the attire of Nāsadyo. What is more, the Pañcatāla music, which usually contains one three-headed drum (New.: *kvatāḥ*) will for once, and only on this occasion, be supplemented with two additional *khimī* drummers, called Bhr̥ṅgī and Nandī. On the toraṇa of the Nāsadyo shrine itself, Niteśvara is depicted with exactly those two attendants: Bhr̥ṅgī, playing the *kvatāḥ* drum, to his right, and Nandī, playing a two-headed *khimī*, on his left (which is a more general representation, see Ellingson 1990:229). Although the two extra drummers are not bringing in an extra *kvatāḥ* drum, it is clear from their names that they constitute the accompaniment of Nāsadyo. Curiously then, in what is said to be a crucial transformation and *rite de passage*, the young incumbent is deified not as Daitya, but as a reflection of Nāsadyo himself. On the way to his home, Daitya's retinue distributes *samay baji* (New.: mixture of beaten and puffed rice, soyabeans, meat, garlic and raw ginger) as *prasāda* (blessed food) to bystanders, something which will not occur any more when Daitya appears in his proper tenue. Daitya will receive his appropriate dress that same evening, after the *sī kāḥ* bhvay that contains shares in the head of the goat sacrificed at Nāsadyo and another one sacrificed that night in the *ākḥā*. Again there are sixteen *sī* to be divided, among, of course, the *gubhāju*, the *nāyos*, Daitya himself (the tongue) and other members of the *khalāḥ* in order of seniority. The old Daitya may participate, but in contrast with the *sī kāḥ* bhay at *ākḥā* svaneḡu, on the day after his own demise, he is no longer obliged to take part.

Unlike the *ghaṅgalā*, which go from the one Daitya to the other until they are worn out, the appropriate dress of shiny red with yellow brocade has to be newly made every five years at a cost of Rs 3000 (last time). The responsibility for presenting Daitya's attributes on the spot is assigned to specific families who do not live in Ombahāl and do not participate in the selection of a Daitya. The dress itself, for example, is brought by the eldest (New.: *thāypā*) of the Śākya of Lagan quarter. Likewise, a Śākya from Saubahāl brings the *tvahā*, the four bangles which Daitya wears around his upper and under arms, and a Śākya from Cikaṁmugaḥ Bahāl brings a necklace of coral. Surprisingly the most important ornament, the divine crown (New.: *makuta*) is sent every five years for inspection or repair to a Tulādhar in Dagubahāl in Asan – the very point of departure for Daitya's counterpart Kumār – in what seems to be the only connection between the two groups (mediated, though, by a Maharjan (Farmer) who brings the crown to and fro). The assembly of elders which which fulfill the main tasks in the

Daitya pyākham, including the organisation of feasts and rituals, together with the total assembly of musicians (at least five Paytāḥ horn blowers are required) all in all amount to a group of about thirty people involved in the main events in Daitya's first performance.

Daitya's dance in front of Nāsadyo in the attire of that god is not considered his first public performance. Only in the night of that day, after the *sī kāḥ bhvay*, is he dressed as Daitya by the *citāyā nāyo*, the elder who takes care of Daitya's decoration. Before going out, on this and other occasions, Daitya has first to enter the *ākhā* with his guru, who will give him the finishing touch before he sets out: the black soot mark on the forehead (*mohanī*) which is shared with him by the *gubhāju* himself. For the five years to come, neither of them can take a *mohanī* mark from any other god or on any other occasion. In the *ākhā* the *gubhāju* also puts the crown on the head of Daitya, who will then step out of the *ākhā* into the courtyard, greeted with a blaring welcome by the *paytāḥ* (long horn) players.

The first dance itself will not be repeated in the five years to come. It is a public event on a stage (New.: *dabū*) in the locality itself, namely *Cikaṁmugaḥ dabū*, the same stage where also the last dance will be performed, but then in the absence of any public. Daitya is in his movements (the sequence of which, without repetitions, takes only a couple of minutes to complete) accompanied by the *Pañcatāla* music of the Śākya. The ensemble consists of at least five *paytāḥ* players, a *tāḥ* (New.: small cymbals), a *babhu* (New.: big cymbals) and a *kvatāḥ* (New.: three-headed drum) player, as well as one or more singers (cf Ellingson 1990:268, who omits the *babhu* cymbals, and Lewis 1984:390, who speaks of a "*thā*" drummer).

In the morning after his first performance Daitya shall, accompanied by the *Pañcatāla* musicians, for the first time act as a guardian of the royal goddess Taleju. Has he, one may wonder, been prepared for that particular task? On inquiry it appeared that not a single component of his training is related to this goddess or to her protection. It is even prohibited for Daitya to take the *mohanī* mark which, during Dasain, is given in the name of the Goddess by every family head to the members of his household. Daitya's training, the *gubhāju* affirmed, is entirely centered upon Nāsadyo. The repertoire of songs, it is true, contains homages to divinities which Daitya passes on his way to Hanuman Dhoka palace, and for whom he makes a short dance en route (New.: *dyo lhāyegu*). Yet none of those is dedicated to Taleju for whom, in the words of the old Daitya, "He has not to bow" (i.e. not to make a *namaskāra*). Similarly absent in his instruction are any references to the character of Daitya himself, that is, to the role he has to enact. Daitya is, in all respects, trained as a devotee of Nāsadyo, up to the point of identification:

during the crucial transition to divinity on the day preceding Mahāsaptamī he does not appear as Daitya but as a mirror image of Nāsadyo. Although that transition does not have to be repeated in the years to come, it is to Nāsadyo that the boy owes worship every morning and evening, both in the ākhā of his own house and at the shrine of the god.

During his five-year term, Daitya cannot take any food touched by somebody else (New.: *cipaḥ*) and cannot sleep outside his own house. In case one of his parents comes to die, however, he has to take up his abode in his guru's house, for he himself cannot be touched by death pollution. Still, even then, he has to make his daily worship in his ākhā, in the house where death has struck. Apparently his association with Nāsadyo not only excludes but also transcends the idea of death pollution that is otherwise so central to Nepalese thought and society. Although, from the point of view of the palace and the royal goddess, the godly performer has to act on three occasions only – and that within a space of time of four days – Daitya remains part of the boy's identity during the whole five-year period. At the same time his vocation as a Daitya dancer seems to be something casual compared to the daily devotion he owes to Nāsadyo.

With regard to the central position attributed to Nāsadyo, Kumār's orientation does not differ from Daitya's; both boys are ardent devotees of Nāsadyo from the beginning to the end. A comparison between them, therefore, does not elucidate main issues like their contrasted identities and their relationship with the goddess Taleju Bhavānī. The initiation into their divine roles and their further course of life run about parallel, yet there are some notable and not always explicable differences. The different stages in the training of Kumār may, as in Daitya's case, be contracted under the pressure of time.

The principal rituals are not determined by jyotiṣa but by convenience, a difference which may be attributed to the fact that Kumār's guruju, in contrast to Daitya's, is not also an astrologer himself. Another, perhaps not all too significant, difference is that in the past two decades, the Tulādhār have replaced some but not all of the prescribed goat sacrifices by duck sacrifices. In the latter case Kumār receives, instead of the goat's tongue, the right wing of the bird as his share, and his guru the head of it, while the other parts (in case of a duck only five) are divided among the nāyos. As in the Śākya khalah, most nāyos stand for the different instruments of the Pañcatāla music. In addition to the mū nāyo, they consist of the kvatāḥ nāyo, the paytāḥ nāyo, and the babhu nāyo. There is also a citākāri or citā nake nāyo whose task it is to decorate Kumār and serve food, but he is not considered to be nāyo proper and does not have a share in the sī. A tāḥ nāyo is absent in the Kumār pyākham because the tāḥ are not played by the

Tulādhār themselves but by a group of five Vajrācāryas. Formerly, families other than those belonging to the khalah used to bring different items of dress and decoration for Kumār, like in case of Daitya. Castes other than Urāy participated in it as well, such as Shrestha (giving dress) and Citrakār (giving the jabi for Kumār's loins). At present the nāyo takes care of all attributes except for the shiny upper-dress (New.: *tās*) of Kumār which still comes as a gift from a Tulādhār family of Asan.

A main difference with the setting of Daitya's sacred space is that Nāsadyo is not transferred to Kumār's own house but to that of the mū nāyo in Dagubahāl, and only for the period of a new Kumār's instruction. Afterwards Kumār has to direct his devotion solely to the Nāsadyo shrine in Taḥchembahāl, to which also his guru belongs. At the start of his course Kumār first brings kisali to his guru and then, together with his guru, to Nāsadyo. Just like the *kisali tayegu* by Daitya, this pledge is ideally made on the eve of the demise of the old Kumār. A few days later *ākhā svanegu* takes place, on the occasion of which formerly two goats were sacrificed, one at Nāsadyo and one at the ākhā, according to the same pattern as that of the Śākya. The practice has however been abandoned since about twenty years ago, and hence there is no question of the old and the new Kumār coming together in a *sī kāḥ bhay* to share the tongues of the animals sacrificed. The old Kumār gets his last share of *sī* at a *sī kāḥ bhay* just before he falls off the stage in his parting dance.

The new Kumār is made to step over three maṇḍalas (New.: *tripada kāyekegu*) on which areca nuts are laid – a ceremony comparable to the seven steps Daitya takes at his final consecration. Apart from installing the Nāsadyo kāpaḥ in a room of the mū nāyo's house, ten nails are driven into the ceiling above Nāsadyo, which are, according to the gubhāju, to protect the ākhā from the ten directions and their overlords. The list of the latter is peculiar in more than one respect, not least because it includes Kumār himself: Indra, Yama, Varuṇa, Kumāra, Vāyu, Īśāna, Nairṛtya, Nāga, Asura and Ūrdhva. The ten nails are encircled by a thread. In this way the guardian of the guardian goddess is guarded in turn against what are generally seen as the guardians of the ten directions: the chain of guardianship appears without beginning or end. At ākhā svanegu the new Kumār symbolically practices some dancing passes which he is yet to learn. After about a week of practice the ghaṅgalā bracelets are handed over to him in the ākhā in the *ghaṅgalā svanegu* ceremony which is again less elaborate than that of the Śākya. Instead of the goat sacrifice, the dedication of the musical instruments, and another *sī kāḥ bhay*, the performance of a *kalah pūjā* (New.: standard worship with flowers, incense, light and foods) is sufficient. In contrast with Daitya's instruction schedule, Kumār is from the beginning being trained with the

accompaniment of music in Dagubahāl. For specific instructions, or if it proves necessary, he receives complementary teachings in his guru's house.

While Daitya and the music accompanying him pay reverence to many gods but not to Taleju herself, Kumār learns to dance to the accompaniment of songs – not caryāgīt – which are dedicated to three gods; one is devoted to Nāsadyo or Nrtyanātha Lokanātha, one to Annapūrnā and one to Guhyeśvarī – who is also *iṣṭadevatā* (the chosen deity) of the gubhāju himself. So, while there is no song dedicated to Taleju by that name, the song and dance to Guhyeśvarī, which are also enacted inside the palace compound for Taleju, do according to the gubhāju refer to this goddess; Guhyeśvarī represents Taleju. As for the rules that accompany the teaching of Kumār, he and his guru may not take a mohani (charm) prepared by anybody else. Like in Daitya's case this mohani appears to mark the bond between guru and śiṣya. Although Kumār starts his Dasain dances from Dagubahāl and gets his mohani only on the way, at the Nāsadyo shrine in Tachembahāl, he is commonly seen as divinized already when he comes out of Dagubahāl wearing his makuta. In the view of the gubhāju the part of the dance which precedes his giving of the mohani does not yet have the required sacred character.

It is also commonly held by the Tulādhār community that Kumār may not sleep or eat outside his house, and this was partly confirmed, with regard to sleeping, by the young Kumār himself. In this regard the view of the gubhāju is less strict: Kumār is allowed to eat outside but not to eat *cipaḥ*, food touched by others. He may also sleep elsewhere, but not in the house of his mother's brother – who in Kumār's case is to carry him off the stage after his demise. A further rule is that nobody may cross Kumār at the stairs, and if this happens nevertheless – which is likely once a while – a *kṣamā* (forgiveness) pūjā has to be done for Nāsadyo. Although Kumār is to worship Nāsadyo for five years, the training periods for his dance in subsequent years are limited to about a week of rehearsal with his-guru. The ritual is likewise confined to one goat (or nowadays a duck) sacrifice and a *śi kāḥ* bvaḥ on the eve of Mahāsaptamī.

The conclusion of Kumār's initial instruction does not have to coincide with that particular evening as it has to in the case of Daitya. The ritual that precedes the first dance of the divine boys – in Kumār's case performed at Asan dabū – are equally elaborate, however. The final ceremony, which is called musī pūjā by the Śākya but *pidanegu* (New.: "making a first appearance") by the Tulādhār, likewise requires the sacrifice of two goats, one on the eve of pidanegu and one that day itself. The second sacrifice is not executed in the ākhā, but like that of the evening before, at the Nāsadyo shrine itself, where the assembly has stayed overnight. The ākhā, by contrast,

does not receive a sacrifice but is removed on the very day of pidanegu; the Nāsadyo kāpaḥ, and therewith Nāsadyo himself, is transferred back to the shrine in Taḥchembahāl. Appearances are that the Tulādhār are willingly leaving the practice of goat sacrifice in the ākhā, that is, in the house of the mū nāyo. Nāsadyo will be installed there again after five years only, when a new Kumār is to be initiated.

After the morning sacrifice and pūjā at Nāsadyo, the gubhāju hands over the musical instruments to the players, and to Kumār his dress. The mohani that is prepared during the sacrifice will be used for the coming five years at the time of Kumār's dances. After receiving the mohani, the boy will for the first time make a dance. Unlike Daitya he does so in his full dress. Yet, like in Daitya's case, the dance is devoted to Nāsadyo and is not considered to be the first dance of Kumār. The boy also gets a moustache, but instead of a third eye, a *jayabi* (victory sign ?) is painted on his forehead. It is rectangular consisting of seven blocks, a vertical one in the middle with three horizontal ones on each side. Spelled as *jay jabhi*, it is mentioned by Kasā as an attribute of Nāsadyo without further explanation (Kasā 1965: ४) His guru and the other Vajrācāryas are given a vajra sign while the Tulādhār khalah – consisting of about thirty members – all get a lotus painted on their forehead. There are other indications that Kumār, in this phase of his being, represents Nāsadyo rather than the Kumār who he is yet to become. Like Daitya, he is, on the way to the mū nāyo's house, accompanied by a musical ensemble which includes two extra khim drums. Although the additional khim are not named Bhrngī and Nandī, the attendants of Nāsadyo, the parallel with the Śākya procedure is too close to be insignificant. On the way home the mū nāyo himself plays the kvatāḥ drum.

Only after partaking in the sī, after consuming the tongue of the goat sacrificed that morning, the boy goes out to perform his first dance as Kumār. The first dance takes place at Asan dabū, and even though Kumār has by then obtained his final identity, this performance is given just for the grace of it. It has as yet nothing to do with the specific task assigned to him. Kumār shows himself to the public on his own behalf, independent from the protective role for which he has been called into being. It is as if he still manifests Nāsadyo, be it in the guise of Kumār. In the preface to his collection of songs to Nāsadyo Prem Bahādur Kasā pays attention to Kumār's dance but almost ignores the Kumār identity of the dancer. The Kumār dancer as Kasā calls him, must keep Nāsadyo in him, "draw him along", not only during his dances for Taleju but during his full term as a Kumār dancer. "When his term comes to an end, he is forced down from the stage by the necessary ritual (*vidhi*). Then only will Nāsadyo leave him and set him free from his *bandhan*, his bond (Kasā 1965: ५)

The identities of both Kumār and Daitya then contain a fundamental mystery. No part of their instruction is related either to the goddess they are to protect or to their own identity as Daitya or Kumār. Both of them have an almost exclusive relationship with Nāsadyo. It is as if two originally separate enactments, the divinization of the Śākya and Tulādhar boys in their opposed yet similar identities on the one hand, and the descent of the royal goddess on the other hand, meet each other almost by accident, or, to put it more faithfully, by the grace of some higher agency. For at the moment suprême itself; when Taleju Bhavānī makes her short yātrās up and down her high abode, and Daitya and Kumār perform their dances, nobody would call into question the sense of purpose behind it all. Indeed, if Daitya and Kumār manage to come in time, the sheer synchronicity of events offers enough proof of a divine scheme which need not be fully comprehended by any of the participants. The assignment of Daitya and Kumār in those events, which did not become evident from their own preparations for it, may still have a clue in the overall context of their acts during Dasain. As was observed above, they not only accompany the movement of the goddess, but also the khaḍga yātrā, the sword procession at the conclusion of Dasain. Both events will be scrutinized in the following sections.

The Descent and Ascent of Taleju Bhavānī

Both Kumār and Daitya's own people and the more informed outsiders hold that the two divine figures came along with the goddess Taleju Bhavānī to protect her on her way to Nepal, and that, therefore, the two of them turn up again during Taleju's short moves up and down the temple. Although Taleju is said to have four representations (see also Pradhan 1986: 309), which are covered when they are taken up and down, a fifth one may be added to them. The image of Guhyeśvarī in the form of a maṇḍala, which also resides in the Taleju temple and is shown to the public on Mahānavamī, is taken out in a real yātrā. Accompanied by the guruju peleton (the antiquated army brass band which belongs to the rājguru), the image is carried to the pītha of Guhyeśvarī on the tenth day of Mārga Kṛṣṇa in November. This maṇḍala, which is, together with one of Bhairava, taken in a khat from the Taleju temple to the most powerful Guhyeśvarī pītha to stay there overnight, is alternately called Taleju or Guhyeśvarī, by some people combined to Taleju Guhyeśvarī.

Daitya and Kumār do not however come to accompany the Goddess in what is a real yātrā, but only during the short moves of the four images in Dasain. The timing of those moves is determined by calculating an auspicious moment (sāit), which is to be passed on to the responsible Tulādhar and Śākya elders. However that may be, on Mahāsaptamī morning (1992) both

Kumār and Daitya came late: Taleju had already been brought down. Not only did both of them come too late for the set time, but Daitya, in addition, arrived only after Kumār had already left the scene, while, according to rule, they should have come together. In the morning of the tenth day of Dasain, Vijayā Daśamī, things went better. Daitya and Kumār staged their dance together – but without having any interaction – on the dabū in Trisulchowk, the courtyard adjoining the stairs leading up to the temple, at the very moment that Taleju was being carried up. Their programme, which they also duly performed when coming too late, is identical on both occasions and will be viewed in some more detail now.

On the eve of Mahāsaptamī the elders, the gubhāju and the performing Daitya cq. Kumār have a sī kāḥ bhvay of a goat sacrificed at their respective Nāsadyo shrines (recently replaced by a duck sacrifice in the Tulādhar's case). In the morning of Mahāsaptamī the dressing up and decoration of Daitya and Kumār is almost casual. Daitya remains an ordinary boy until he enters the ākhā with his gubhāju and receives his mohaniṅ tikā and crown. Kumār's dedication, it was noticed, contains a slight complication : his makuta is put on in the nāyo's house in Dagubahāl but his mohaniṅ mark is given by the gubhāju on the way to Hanuman Dhoka, when the small procession passes the Nāsadyo shrine at Tachembahāl. There Kumār first goes inside the bahāl to worship Nāsadyo with an offering of light (New.: *itā*) and husked rice (New.: *jāki*) in the company of his father. Considering the importance of the mohaniṅ mark it is surprising that Kumār dances as a divinity before receiving it, but, contrary to the gubhāju's opinion, the elders think it does not matter too much.

Both Kumār and Daitya themselves are slightly hesitant to tell about their feelings as divine dancers. Kumār, 10 years old, told that he sometimes has the feeling of being a god during the performance, while Daitya, 17 years old, said that he felt a little unconscious of himself after receiving the mohaniṅ. The previous Daitya however (now 20 years old) did not feel such a change in himself, except during his last dance – when Daitya was passing away from him. Whatever the real feeling of the boys, the show itself is entirely convincing. Kumār makes short but intriguing dances (of about two minutes) in front of Dagubahāl (where the mū nāyo lives), at Asan dabū (the site of his first dance), in front of Tahchembahāl (where he worships Nāsadyo and receives the mohaniṅ), in front of Janabahāl (the residence of Seto Macchendranāth) and at Indrachowk, before entering Hanuman Dhoka. Lewis (390) reports that the performances inside the palace compound are closed to the public. In fact the public attention is considerable and, especially at Vijayā Daśamī, the stage (dabū) in Trisulchowk where Daitya and Kumār are performing together is surrounded by a crowd of onlookers. Only white

people and very black people (negroes) are refused entrance.

Inside the palace compound both Kumār and Daitya dance for a few minutes at the stage in Trisulchowk as well as in front of the Tribhula shrine at the foot of the Taleju temple. Then they proceed to Mulchowk (in line with the temple stairs and Trisulchowk) where Taleju resides in her (closed) Pūjā Koṭhā. After a short dance in Mulchowk they divert their course to the more Eastern Nasalchowk, the courtyard which was in Malla and early Shaha times the place for performing drama at the palace. After staging a similar dance there, Daitya and Kumār leave through Hanuman Dhoka. In front of the palace gate they make a very short dance before returning by the same way as they came and stopping at the same places for a dance to greet the main gods (dyo lhāyegu).

No effort will be made here to describe the dance movements of Kumār or Daitya. Kumār does not display a martial outlook, but by his serpentine movements, he certainly casts a spell on the public. The bow which Kumār carries goes without an arrow and is held by him without feigning its actual use. Both Daitya and Kumār are accompanied by Pañcatāla musicians. Daitya appears the more aggressive one, especially towards the end of his dances when, brandishing his dagger, he makes a sudden advance before coming to an abrupt standstill. In contrast with Kumār he first dances in the courtyard (Ganthinani) of his own house, where the ākhā is established, and does so again at this return, just before entering the ākhā with his guru to remove the spell. Like Kumār he also dances in the alley leading to the ākhā, just outside his own courtyard. Beyond his own abode, on the way to and from Hanuman Dhoka, he dances when passing Cikammugaḥ dabū (the site of his first dance) and once more at the crossroads of Maru, before proceeding to Hanuman Dhoka.

From the viewpoint of time then, and also from that of the ritual involved, the outward manifestation of Kumār and Daitya on the Mahāsaptamī and the Vijayā Daśamī morning of Dasain, represents only a fraction of the energies that have been vested in them. They can complete their tour, in just over an hour, while their actual presence at Taleju's residence inside the palace compound is confined to about twenty minutes. What we see are two divinized boys who, provided with their proper weapons, dashingly approach Hanuman Dhoka from the North and the South. Those directions also mark the very distinction between them, with Kumār belonging to the Upper city and oriented towards the sky, and Daitya belonging to the Lower city and oriented towards the netherworld. When both of them meet in the very centre of town, it is striking to note that their separation remains. There is no clash between them but no other exchange either. Evidently the separation between Thane and Kyane has to be maintained in the domain of the Goddess who

supposedly transcends the division.

To protect the Goddess, it appears, the two chosen guardians should not form one party, but, on the contrary, they must constitute two opposed ones. This striking feature is significant within the overall ritual structure of the city, as will be seen in the concluding section. First another riddle has to be tackled, namely the presence of Kumār and Daitya during the khadga yātrā in the night of Vijayā Daśamī. The goddess Taleju has returned to her abode that very morning and will not be taken out until next year. And reversely, in the night of Vijayā Daśamī, the parties of Kumār and Daitya do not again enter the domain of the royal goddess. They join the sword procession when it comes out of the palace. If their main task and their accumulated powers are all directed towards protecting the goddess, how to interpret the necessity of their presence during the khadga yātrā ?

Khadga Yātrā

The ceremony called khadga yātrā (New.: *pāyo*) is observed at different levels of society and in various manifestations. In every Newar household a mostly secret khadga yātrā is performed in or starting from the household shrine (New.: *āgarācheṃ*) where, among other things, a kalaśa (jar) representing the Goddess is installed. The climax of this khadga yātrā is the cleaving of a pumpkin – a common replacement of a buffalo and of the buffalo demon – with a sword. Only the male members enact this symbolic victory of the Goddess over her enemy, making shaking movements as if possessed. The household ceremony generally takes place in the morning of Vijayā Daśamī, but the Kusle or Jugi caste performs it the day before and the Tulādhār of Asan the day after Vijayā Daśamī. A peculiarity of the latter is that they bring the khadga yātrā outside and make a round of Asan shaking their swords before they cleave the pumpkin in a courtyard – with the youngest member, who also went ahead in the procession, taking precedence over the elders.

During the day and during the night of Vijayā Daśamī, the tenth day of Dasain marking the victory of the goddess, various other khadga yātrā parties go out from different dyocheṃ, a nearly complete list of which is given by Pradhan (Map III, after p. 313). Some of those offer a spectacular sight. The pāyo group of the Vatu Bhadrakālī dyocheṃ comes out in the dress of the gaṇa of the goddess and her attendants. Like in divine dances such as the Gathu Bhadrakālī pyākhaṃ, they wear the robes of the aṣṭamāṭrkā. Although they go without masks, the different māṭrkās are identifiable by the colours of their robes. Brandishing and shaking their swords the gaṇa makes three short moves in Vatu quarter, one to the East, one to the South and one to the West, before going back into the dyocheṃ. Just preceding their expedition a baupā (a portion of special food for malevolent spirits) is brought out and

deposited in front of the dyochem̄ to placate the *bhūt-pret*, the ghosts.

One would expect the *khadga yātrā* of the royal palace to be more impressive than the one staged by the *Jyāpu* of Vatu. On the contrary, however, the *khadga yātrins* of the central goddess do not represent her *gaṇa* and, like the *Tulādhars* of Asan, they go about in ordinary dress. In 1991 the 12-yearly *Bhadrakālī pyākham̄* took place starting with the exchange of swords (*khadga siddhi*) between *Bhadrakālī* (embodied as a masked dancer) and the king of Nepal in the night of *Vijayā Daśamī*, in front of the Northern gate to Taleju temple (*Simha Duvāh*). The eleven masked *Gathu* dancers representing the *gaṇa* of *Bhadrakālī* took up position there, shaking their bodies and their specific weapons. The king exchanged swords with *Bhadrakālī* at the moment that the *gaṇa* was met by the *khadga yātrā* coming from the *Simha Dhoka* (the Western gate of the Taleju temple). *Kumār* and *Daitya* performed their dance facing the *Bhadrakālī gaṇa* and the *khadga siddhi*. Because of the added lustre of the king's sword exchange with the goddess, the number of sword - carriers from the palace was considerably higher than in 1992 (for the *Bhadrakālī pyākham̄* see Van den Hoek 1994). In ordinary years the king, who supposedly once took lead in the *khadga yātrā* (Pradhan 1986:311) does not attend. In the absence of the impressive *gaṇa* of divine dancers, the ceremony bears a much more sober character. The luster given to it springs from the outstanding roles of *Daitya* and *Kumār*. Their presence in the *khadga yātrā* remains a mystery, however, for which no clarification could be obtained. Only the overall composition of the event may still hold a clue to it.

The *Karmācāryas* start the enterprise with a *kotaḥ pūjā* (a standard set of offerings on a brass plate) in the room adjacent to the *Pūjā Kothā* which Taleju herself has left that morning. In that room (New.: *naḥlasvām taye kothā*) the sacred *naḥlasvām* (New.: barley and maize sprouts grown in the dark) of *Dasain* is still standing (worshipped daily by a *Rājopādhyāya* Brahmin from *Ghatasthāpanā* onwards) and also the swords are placed there. The *kotaḥ*, the brass plate containing the items of worship, is prepared by *Jyāpu* ladies who are called *laykumisā*, palace women, but the *pūjā* itself is performed by the *Karmācāryas* in secret. After completing his worship, the *mū ācāḥju* (New.: Taleju's main priest) personally went to the *Hanuman Dhoka* to let in the *Jyāpu* who had been stopped there by the army guard. Inside *Mulchowk* several items were handed over to them. A wooden image of *Hanuman* on a stick is given to the *Jyāpu* who will go ahead of the sword procession, according to the *mū ācāḥju* to announce its coming. Two other *Jyāpu* men received a torch of wood, with cotton soaked in oil wrapped around the top of it. Another two were to carry *baupās*, with paper masks of *Bhairava* and *Kumārī* attached to them. Finally two *Jyāpu* were given sticks

(New.: *chali kathi*) with which they were to guard the royal sword in the procession. Significantly, one of them represents Thane and the other one Kvane. Six people including the *mū ācāḥju* took up swords, among whom also one very young *Karmācārya* and a *Jośī*. The royal sword was brought from a special room by a government official. When the party came out of *Siṃha Dhoka*, *Daitya* and *Kumār*, with *Daitya* going in front, joined the head of the procession preceding not only the *pāyo* party but also *Hanuman* and the *baupā*-carriers. They thus go ahead of the actual *khaḍga yātrā*, but that initial sequence could not be maintained all the way. *Daitya* and *Kumār* have to perform their own dances, for which the rest of party does not wait. Furthermore, *Hanuman* moves forward and backward in an unpredictable way and appears really possessed because, according to the *Karmācāryas*, a mantra is cast on him by the *mū ācāḥju* in *Mulchowk* when he wraps a turban around the head of the person to carry – and to be – *Hanuman*. Interestingly, *Daitya* and *Kumār* all along make the same shaking movements as the sword-carriers make or should make. After coming out of the Western gate of the *Taleju* temple the procession moves first in a Southern direction to the crossroads just below *Kāṣṭhamaṇḍap*, and then, passing *Maru Gaṇeśa*, it goes Northward through *Pyāphal* to the army quarters of *Kamphukot*. It crosses the notorious kot and passes the *Mahādeva* temple and *Makhan* on the way to *Vaṅghaḥ* (*Indrachowk*), the northernmost point.

Kumār and his company leave the procession there, at *Indrachowk*, and return home. *Daitya* returns with the procession through *Makhan* back to the palace and takes leave there. The two *bau* are deposited at *Siṃha Duvāḥ* (the Northern gate to *Taleju*) in front of the right and the left lion-guardians, who according to some informants, again represent the *Thane* and *Kvane* divide. Then the party continues to the Western gate of the *Taleju* temple and waits there till the *Siṃha Dhoka* is opened to let them in again. Once inside they ascend the stairs of the *Taleju* temple and circumambulate it. Down the stairs the *khaḍga* are collected by the *Jośī*. The *mū ācāḥju* then performs an elaborate welcoming ceremony (*lasakusa*) for the swords and for the *Hanuman* image by turning a *siṃpha* (New.: wooden measuring pot always used for this purpose) over them, performing a *koṭaḥ pūjā*, and symbolically handing over the key as well. The key taken is not the one to *Taleju's Pūjā Koṭhā*, but to another secret room of worship in *Mulchowk* where the swords are kept the rest of the year and where only *ācāḥjus* may enter. They again do a short *pūjā* there, according to their saying to put the swords to rest for one year. Thereby *Dasain*, the greatest festival of *Nepal*, formally ends. It would however be a misrepresentation to view this ending as a rupture in the ritual activities. Not only do several *khaḍga yātrās* – such as the ones in *Kilāgal* and *Bhagvān Bahāl* still have to come out, but also, in that very night, other

Karmācāryas perform a homa in front of Annapūrnā at Asan marking the start of the yātrā of this central and popular goddess. The chain of events, and the network of ritual relations, is hardly ever broken. But Daitya and Kumār's performances stop until next Dasain, unless it happens to be the year of their demise, which will be dealt with in the next section.

What exactly is their role in Dasain? Their participation in the khaḍga yātrā appears to contradict the common statement that they only exist to protect the goddess. Reactions by some participants to this question might indicate a clue. The Śākya nāyo remarked that formerly, but beyond living memory it seems, Daitya and Kumār also had to attend at events like royal weddings and coronations. According to Kumār's guru, the two divinized boys participate in the khaḍga yātrā to protect the royal sword. All those answers were extracted, but the views expressed seem to fit the overall context, which includes not only the movement of the goddess, but that of the swords as well. What Kumār and Daitya appear to protect is the śakti of the realm in the widest sense of the word: its power, which is first of all embodied by the royal goddess who can be called the central śakti herself. This śakti does not however stand on itself, but exists in relation to its shareholder, the ruler of the realm; his sword in particular contains the śakti of the goddess.

Curiously enough, during the centuries that the kingdom of Nepal was divided, Taleju Bhavānī remained the protective goddess of all three Kingdoms of the Valley, which were often at odds with each other. The same goddess was to give victory to the kings of Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu, but on which side would she be? The nature of the goddess Taleju Bhavānī is clearly more complicated than is indicated by the term 'protective' goddess – which suggests that she may give victory to one party only and defeat to the others. Perhaps equally curious is that the protective goddess of the kingdom has in turn to be protected, not by a single party, but by two young protectors who are, not only in a topographical but also in a cosmological sense, opposed to each other. Likewise the royal sword is on both sides protected by what is called in Newari a *chali kathi*, a mace. The two stick carriers, however, again manifest the opposition in orientation. One of them belongs, like Kumār does, to Thane, the Upper part of the city, the other has to belong to the Lower part, Kvane. The opposition between the two opposed realms of the city appears to be in-built, as if the śakti exists by the grace of parties that are opposed to each other. Daitya and Kumār closely resemble each other, yet, or perhaps for that reason, they do not enter into a complementary relationship but are kept carefully apart.

The Demise

Both Kumār and Daitya have to die, symbolically one might say, but who or what passes away in them is even harder to determine than in case of the divine dancers of the Gathu pyākhaṁ (Van den Hoek 1994). The Śākya mūnāyo suggested that in former times a Daitya might serve until his real death or at least as long as he was able to perform. That the embodiment of Daitya is now confined to five years might be due to the requirements of the time. As it is, however, both the coming into being and the demise of Daitya and Kumār constitute one of the most significant and ritually elaborate aspects of the whole divine enactment. Daitya and Kumār have to be young, and in order to be so, they have to die in time. From the viewpoint of mythology, Daitya is the young lover and enemy of the goddess, killed by her before he comes of age. Kumār, of course, represents a different case, as he, from the puranic point of view, is the son of the goddess. His demise will also be seen to be different from that of Daitya. Yet, if any god stands for eternal youth, it is Kumār, and in that respect there is no difference with Daitya. Both of them require a youthful embodiment.

Daitya is left alone to die at the same stage where he performed his first dance, Cikāmmugaḥ dabū. A sī kāḥ bhvay precedes his final dance. At his going to the stage and at the start of his dance the musicians still accompany him. Then his ghaṁgalā (bracelets) are taken off and the music retreats. Nobody is allowed to see his demise. The Jyāpu who is to catch the boy when he falls off the stage should not look at the parting dance either. Anybody who breaks the prohibition will die vomiting blood, it is told. Because the event happens at late night, there will probably be no bystanders to be warned anyway. Daitya got some special instruction from his guru for his final part, the only dance without the accompaniment of music. In his memory it took more than half an hour of dancing alone before he started to feel unconscious. During his five year term he had never felt possessed. It was only when Daitya left him that he got such an experience. Having become unconscious he fell off the stage, and did not regain consciousness until his guru touched him at home to take off his dresses.

After his demise Daitya is carried home by the Jyāpu covered with a white shroud like a dead man. There is, according to the gubhāju, no need to revive the boy. Since it is Daitya who died in him and not the boy himself, the latter will recover by himself, freed from Daitya's presence. According to the mūnāyo he is revived by some water sprinkled by the gubhāju together with the uttering of a mantra. However that may be, his mother gives a formal welcome (New.: lasakusa) to her son with a kotaḥ pūjā. After his dress is taken off downstairs the now ex-Daitya shares a ritual meal (sagaṁ) with the other members of the khalah. According to the ex-Daitya, the Daitya-to-be

had already started his training a few days before his own demise, contrary to the ideal sequence. Old and new Daitya had talked together on how it was and would be. Neither of them had been chosen by lot; they replaced the ones who had been drawn. After Daitya's demise the ākhā in his house ceases to exist and the Nāsakāpaḥ is removed and put at the Nāsadyo shrine by the gubhāju.

In contrast with Daitya, Kumār will not be left alone to die. His last dance at Asan Dabū is a public event, in which he is accompanied by the musicians to the very end. One of the musicians, the kvatāḥ player, actually brings about the end. By pushing him further and further with his drum he is causing Kumār's falling-off-the-stage, *kvaphāyegu*. The same Newari term is used for Daitya's downfall, but, in its literal meaning of "dropping", "causing to fall down" (Manandhar 1986:34) it seems better applicable to Kumār's case. The gubhāju's explanation for the seemingly involuntary fall of Kumār is that the kvatāḥ drum, while pushing Kumār, draws his śakti out of him. The divine power, according to Kumār's guru, also entered Kumār through the kvatāḥ drum, while the power of the drum itself, it is known, originates from Nāsadyo himself.

The present Kumār has been proposed by his father who wanted to continue a family tradition; both he himself and his own father, the present Kumār's grandfather, had been Kumār in their time. Kumār's father remembers how he was pushed off the stage, but also that he fainted while falling off. Like Daitya, the fallen Kumār is to be covered with a white shroud like a dead man. The one who carries him home is not a Jyāpu, however, but his mother's brother, a relative who plays a major part in the initiation ceremony (Vratibandha) of Newar boys. When in the Vratibandha ceremony the boys are dressed like sannyāsins (world renouncers) and are given the choice to renounce the world, their mother's brother stands ready to catch them in case they might indeed choose to do so. Since Kumār can be considered to have renounced the world for five years in his partly divine identity, the death of the divinity in him can also be seen as a re-socialization. From that point of view it is most appropriate that he is carried by his mother's brother on his way back to the social world.

When the present Kumār's father woke up from unconsciousness, he found himself back in his house, where his Kumār dress and decorations had already been taken off. His guru was there to give him the ritual food (sagaṁ) together with a Sanskrit śloka. In Kumār's case there is no ākhā to be removed, although a new temporary one has to be installed in the mū nāyo's house for the instruction of the new incumbent. It is often said by the participants and also by Kumār's gubhāju that it is not the boy who dies, naturally, but Kumār, the divinity who was in him. At the same time it is

not clearly stated that the god Kumār himself is supposed to die.

The intermezzo between the demise of the old Kumār or Daitya and the forming of a new one is kept as short as possible. Yet a sacrifice seems to be made, but one in which neither the boy nor the god is a clearly recognizable victim. What appears to be dying is the living presence of the god, shortly after it reborn in a new and again young embodiment. Nevertheless the short lapse of time between the passing away of the god from the one embodiment and his rebirth or re-entry into another one carries with it the signs of death. Part of the symptoms are experienced by the boys themselves in their falling unconscious. Nobody stated that the boys are at that time partaking in the process of dying, but it is all the same considered inauspicious to enact the passage of death, albeit only that of the god embodied. It is one of the less outspoken reasons to find a replacement in case one's son is chosen by lot to be Kumār. Finally, while the god has to make his re-entry into a new incumbent, the boy has to make his re-entry into human society, undone from his divinity. Although the feelings of unconsciousness, the symptoms of death, can conveniently be attributed to the boy's abandonment by the god, a certain parallelism between the two of them, godly embodiment and god embodied, remains lurking in the background, escaping nobody's notice. In Kumār's as well as in Daitya's case, both the boys and the divinities are reborn, but the *personae* who incorporated the divinities effectively die in that capacity.

Conclusion

The short manifestations of Daitya and Kumār during Dasain are somehow disproportionate to the elaborate ritual complex of which they are part on their own account. Or to turn it the other way around: The labyrinth of rules and procedures to which Daitya and Kumār are subject seems to go far beyond the stated purpose of their protecting the royal goddess. The more so since that very purpose does not at all come forward in either the instruction of the boys or the ritual proceedings that lead up to their performance. While embodying different characters, the attention of both Daitya and Kumār is almost exclusively devoted to Nāsadyo, who appears to transcend not only the divinities embodied by the boys, but also their death. During the interval between their demise and their re-entry into new incumbents, the gods seem to be retaken, as it were, by Nāsadyo. The quality of Nāsadyo to transcend the divine play of which he himself is the source and origin, is also seen in other divine dramas which show an alternating cycle of life and death.

There is no phenomenon which is not historically grown, and on the face of it, it seems as if in Kumār's and Daitya's case a divine drama dedicated to Nāsadyo is only loosely linked to the central goddess and the major festival

of Kathmandu. The mū ācāḥju of Taleju, for one thing, is not aware of the different backgrounds of the boys – Śākya and Tulādhār – or of the complicated ritual pattern which they are part of in their own environment. Historically speaking, little can be said. Both the khalah of Daitya and the khalah of Kumār possess a lālmohara of king Pratap Sing Shah, the successor to Prithvi Narayan. The performance of Kumār and Daitya undoubtedly goes further back to the Malla period and is said to have existed in other towns as well. According to Kumār's gubhaju, Prithvi Narayan Shah did away with the Kumār/Daitya pyākham, which was subsequently restored however by his son Pratap Singh – who therefore appears in the official documents as the patron of the performance.

Apart from the strikingly loose connection between Daitya's and Kumār's training on the one hand and the stated purpose of their existence on the other hand, there appears to be another dissonant. The Tulādhār and the Śākya are Buddhist castes, and the royal goddess is not considered to be a Buddhist divinity. The signs of Buddhism in the Daitya and Kumār pyākham are slight. When asked about it, the gubhāju of Daitya told that Buddha is a few times invoked in the secret texts used for the instruction of Daitya. According to Kumār's gubhāju, the dance of his pupil is, at least ultimately, based on a Buddhist text, the Ratna Candraketu Mahāpratihāra. Kumar's crown also contains five jewels representing the Pañcabuddha. Both gubhājus, however, were frank in admitting that the actual performance of Kumār and Daitya has little or nothing to do with Buddhism. From the historical point of view, indications are that the Śākya and Tulādhār were once called upon to participate in a palace ceremony relating to a Hindu goddess, in a way comparable to the royal Kumārī, the Śākya girl's embodiment of Taleju Bhavānī.

History cannot illuminate the matter any further, and what we see at present is a ritual complex surrounding the royal goddess in which Kumār and Daitya apparently occupy a fitting position. The question is: what is the sense of their appearance, of their contrasting identities and of their so-called protection of the royal goddess? Their appearance at the descent and ascent of Taleju does not offer any real clue to the question. As was seen above, Taleju readily descends in the absence of her protectors when they come late. The khaḍga yātrā at Vijayā Dasāmī, the culmination of Dasain, presents us with a different case. Not only do Daitya and Kumār make special dances then, they also go ahead in the procession, making the same shaking movements as the sword-carriers. According to his guru, Daitya, who goes in front, actually participates in the khaḍga yātrā brandishing his dagger, followed by Kumār displaying his bow. Rather than just protecting the goddess, they are thus seen to lead the śakti of the realm in a way which befits their martial

character.

What remains is the riddle of their adverse identities. Why is Kumār's counterpart a Daitya and not, as Lewis wrongly assumes, Gaṇeśa, or for that matter, Bhairava? Instead, the very essence of the couple seems to be that they are not complementary but opposed to each other, as if it is necessary for the warlike expedition to incorporate its adversary. And that seems to be exactly the case. Not only Daitya and Kumār, but also the two stick carriers accompanying the royal sword, represent Thane and Kvane, a division which has all the characteristics of a ritualized battle field (Van den Hoek 1993). If we look into the wider context of Dasain, the main good fortune expected from the royal goddess is that she provides the king with the power of victory. Ironically, during the centuries of political division, each of the Malla kings of the Valley kept Taleju as their protective goddess. This was not due to a transcendental view: Between, and even within the kingdoms, divisions were not transcended at either the human or the divine level. The kings of Patan, Bhaktapur and Kathmandu nevertheless continued to depend on one and the same protective goddess to bestow the power of victory on each of them. There is, again, a truth hidden in that irony.

Of old, the sacrificial nature of warfare was pre-eminent – in spite of all mundane interests involved. War, sacrifice and capital punishment, being closely related, constituted the three sacred tasks of a king since Vedic times – as has been succinctly shown by Heesterman (1985:108-127). In another essay, Heesterman touches upon the role of the woman in it all – not the goddess, but the wife of the sacrificer-king. The woman, who passes out of her own family, has to remain an element of insecurity between two lineages which, through her, establish or maintain a connubial (marital) alliance. In a sacrificial contest – Heesterman's attention centers upon a Vedic midsummer festival – the sacrificer's wife plays a central part because she also represents her own relatives whose connubial (marital) link with the sacrificer's party she embodies (Heesterman 1985:134-136). A similar argument pertains to the battlefield: in a configuration of enemies who are at the same time related to each other – such as existed in case of the Malla kingdoms – women may find themselves embodying both sides in a conflict.

To return to the protective goddesses, their position parallels that of a woman who is related to different parties. As argued elsewhere (Van den Hoek and Shrestha 1992:73), the power of the protective goddess seems to derive from the very fact that she maintains relations with opposed parties, with the enemy and with her "own" party. This may be seen symbolically expressed in the relationship she has with her prototypical enemies: Mahiṣāsura or Daitya. In the great day of victory she beats the demon enemy and thereby protects the realm. With whom, however, is Daitya to be identified? From

Vedic to Puranic times the demonical aspect and the evil character of kings in general is amply expounded. The goddess, then, may bring victory or defeat to either one of the parties engaged in war. As the mū ācāḥju of Taleju explained, Daitya may have demonical traits, but he nevertheless belongs to the gāna, the retinue of the goddess who slays him : the goddess incorporates her enemy.

The khadga yātrās which come out of different Taleju temples at Vijayā Daśamī are not, and were not, opposed to each other in terms of good and evil – nor were, for that matter, parties engaged in actual war opposed in those terms. Instead, the khadga yātrā in Kathmandu with its twofold royal mace representing Thane and Kvane, and with Daitya and Kumār at the head of it, already displays the two sides of the battlefield or sacrificial arena internally. Daitya and Kumār may, when going ahead, be considered the protagonists. They have to die young, perhaps not only because the scriptures prescribe them to be forever youthful, but also because they are heading a sacrificial party which cannot remain without victims at set times. The opposition, between Daitya and Kumār, which is contained in the khadga yātrā, is also embodied in the very nature of the goddess who is not bound to one side in a contest, nor to one ruler or dynasty. Rather she oversees the sacrifice of war as such and claims its victims.

The symbolic enactments of Dasain, of course, have more than one layer of meaning. Daitya and Kumār are explicitly said to protect the protective goddess, and there is no justification to refute that view. The explicit purpose of Daitya's and Kumār's performance, however, is hardly borne out by the rituals observed. Daitya's and Kumār's coming into being is brought about by Nāsadyo, who also survives and recreates them in a new human embodiment. Because Nāsadyo, the patron of temporal grace, has close associations with the death and rebirth of various divine dancers (such as in the Gathu pyākham) and with the periodical rejuvenation of musicians consecrated to him (such as the Jyāpu Dhimay), there is no real contradiction between Daitya's and Kumār's dedication to him, and their dance to protect the protective goddess.

Given the superior power of Taleju Bhavānī the purpose itself seems incongruous – unless protection is taken in a much broader sense than saving the skin of the goddess. A possible extension in meaning should include the leading role of Daitya and Kumār in the khadga yātrā, the manifestation of the śakti of the realm. The śakti of the goddess has to be nourished in many ways, rather than to be protected in the strict sense of the word. Plenty of sacrifice has therefore been made to her on the great eighth and ninth days of Dasain. Yet the ultimate sacrifice is that of war, symbolically expressed by the goddess' slaying of her demon enemy on the tenth day of victory. The

khadga yātrā fulfills a similar purpose. It is unlikely that it has ever been the start of a real war party; therefore its composition is too heavily loaded with symbolism. It did however prelude the war season in times that war and sacrifice were still the main sacred duties of the king – which happened to be so until a few centuries ago. In the composition of the surviving khadga yātrā, war primarily appears to be a matter of sacrifice, like it was in bygone days.

The ghosts from the North and the South, for whom the two baupā offerings are brought along, the contrasting divine fighters, and the royal mace-bearers expressing the same division of the sacrificial field, are all included in the symbolic enactment of the path of war. The protection of Taleju Bhavānī, in this context, extends to her interests in the sacrifice of war, of which the goddess of victory is the primary recipient. The victory of the goddess lies with the victims, who, it should be added, will themselves enjoy the fruits of sacrifice as well. The kingdom will be reborn through sacrifice, whether it is in victory or defeat. And, as long as any candidates can be found, our Kumār and Daitya will through dying be forever young.

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