

BURA JANKO: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY OF AN ANCIENT RITUAL CELEBRATION  
HONORING OLDER ADULTS IN NEWAR CULTURE IN NEPAL AND THE UNITED STATES

By

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This study is dedicated to the late Sir John Crofton of the U.K.,  
the late Merry Slusser of the U.S.A. and  
the late Carl S. Coon of the U.S.A.

I am blessed and honored to dedicate this study to three seniors who were an immense source of inspiration in my life. First is Sir John Crofton, a 97-year-old senior whom I met with Emily, his wife, in Edinburgh, Scotland in the winter of 2008. It was the first meeting in my life with a senior dignitary. Sir John Crofton was a most-respected pioneer and a world leader in respiratory medicine for more than 60 years. He was at the forefront of the modern treatment of tuberculosis, smoking control and medical education. I was extremely surprised that he welcomed me to his residence with his 85- year old wife Lady Emily Crofton. I was honored when he offered me his book “Tobacco: A Global Threat” as a memorable gift. He blessed and inspired me to fight against multinational tobacco companies in my home country to protect children, teens and pregnant women from environmental tobacco smoke pollution and to protect teens from nicotine genocide. I hugged them both for two minutes; it was hard to say “goodbye.” My eyes were full of tears. In June 2008 as advised by Sir John Crofton, I met with Dr. Thomas Friedman, New York City’s Health Commissioner to learn about the policy and strategies of a citywide ban on smoking in bars and other locations and led efforts to eliminate trans fats in restaurants. He was appointed the director of Center Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC) by the Obama administration. During his time as the director, he led the response to several worldwide health crises, including outbreaks of the Zika and Ebola viruses, the rise of drug-resistant tuberculosis and the opioid epidemic. Sir John Crofton passed away in 2009 peacefully in his sleep. In grief, I spent a week praying for his eternal peace.

While I never met the late Mary Shepherd Slusser (1918-2017), she was a true devotee and scholar of Newari culture and art. I am indebted to her for her book, "*Nepal Mandala. A Cultural Study of the Kathmandu Valley, Vol. 1: Text, Vol. 2: Plates,*" published by Princeton University in 1982. She tells a complex and layered story of Kathmandu culture and how Nepal Mandala stands as a rich and deep assessment of Kathmandu Valley culture for many scholars in this world. Slusser shows sympathy and concern for the preservation of Newari heritages after the devastating earthquake in Nepal, which happened between the months of April and May 2015. She visited Nepal and provided her input and support for the renovation of Newari cultural heritages before she passed away in 2017, two-years after the catastrophic earthquake in Nepal. I am grateful to tribute this work to her eternal life.

I also dedicate this study to the late Carleton S. Coon, the celebrant of first, second, and third Bura Janko in the United States. In addition to this, he is the first foreign scholar to celebrate Bura Janko in the Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. Mr. Coon passed away on December 3, 2018. He was active in writing and publishing books until the end of his life. He was a great humanist, anthropologist and veteran diplomat with a spirit which lives on in my heart and soul.

To validate and rediscover my gerontological exposure in professional, academic, and personal life, I attended and volunteered at the 14<sup>th</sup> Global Conference of the International Federation on Aging held from August 8<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>, 2018 in Toronto. The keynote address was by 97-year old long-standing former Mayor of Mississauga, Mrs. Hazel McCallion. She is currently Chief Elder Officer at Rivera Inc. In her address, she promoted the value of living a life with purpose by embracing innovations and the aging experience. I would love for her to have a celebration of the Fourth Bura Janko, Canadian style, on completion of her birthday 99-years-9-months-9-days in most probably 2020 and will explore how to accomplish this.

## **Acknowledgement**

This study is not possible without the guidance of my supervisor Dr. Lorraine Mercer with her academic interest, and generosity along with tireless patience. She permitted me to visit Portland, Oregon, in the United States, to personally observe and explore the Bura Janko in the typical Newari Buddhist immigrant community. I was so humbled and honored by her willingness to be my thesis supervisor. I intend to apply both a gerontological and anthropological lens to Bura Janko as a contribute to a potential discourse in the academic community.

I am deeply indebted to distinguished university professors emerita Dr. Carolyne Ellis and Dr. Art Bochner and their pioneering contribution on autoethnographic research that has inspired me to carry out this study. I am also greatly indebted to Emeritus Professor and Laurentian University Anthropology Work Study Program Supervisor, Dr. Kathryn Molohon, who graciously has guided me to carry out an autoethnographic thesis on Bura Janko and who kindly has become a committee member for this study. She helped me write a full conference paper as a co-author entitled “Bura Janko: A medieval Newari Ceremony to Celebrate Old Age in Contemporary Nepal.” It was possible for me to present this academic paper at the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial Association for Anthropology, Gerontology and the Life Course conference held in Oxford Brookes University, England on June 8-9, 2017 at the “Age, Place and Community” Panel.

I feel honored and proud that Emeritus Professor and distinguished anthropologist Mary Catherine Bateson (who is Margaret Mead’s daughter), attended my presentation at the Oxford Brookes conference who showed deep concern and interest in Bura Janko tradition and its potential for ageing wellness. She inspired me to carry out this study for the academic arena.

She was also the Oxford Brookes keynote speaker on “The Age of Active Wisdom: A New Stage in Human Revolution.” I would like to express my sincere gratitude for Professors Christian McDonough and Jason Danley at Oxford Brookes University, David Gellner at Oxford University, United Kingdom, and Jay Sokolovsky at South Florida University in the United States for their academic interest and motivation to further this study on human development and culture. My heartfelt thanks go to Dr. Alexander Von Rospatt, Professor of University of California, Berkley for the pioneering academic research about Bura Janko, and Dr. Ellen Coon, a former U.S. Full Bright Scholar for sharing generous experiences extraordinarily celebrating the glorious first, second and third Bura Janko of her beloved father Dr. Carl Coon with mother.

I am also grateful for Dr. Krishnan Venkatraman, the Head of the Huntington University Department of Gerontology, and Dr. Kevin McCormick, President/Vice-Chancellor, Huntington University for the travel grant for my presentation and their insightful and inspirational remarks on the media press release about my presentation. I am also very grateful to Christine Catt, Communications Director at Huntington University for preparing and circulating a media press release on my presentation at the conference. As a result, the Sudbury Star daily local newspaper and Sudbury.com online published the news and highlight. I would also like to express my sincere appreciation to Dr. Natasha Gerolami, Head Librarian at the J.W. Tate Library at Huntington University for helping and guiding me to search relevant references for this study.

Kudos to my brother, priest Prajwal Ratna Vajracharya in Portland, Oregon for the wonderful hospitality and excellent arrangement for observing his client celebrant’s first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) and her families and friends in a typical Buddhist Newari immigrant community. Finally, I have no words to express my gratefulness for my beloved wife Indu (Laxmi) and daughter Lucy, as they will always be my guardians, mentors, and pathfinders.

## Abstract

Bura Janko is an ongoing 5,000-year-old ritual celebration. It honours older adults in the Newar community in Nepal and in immigrant Newar communities around the world. These celebrations preserve the ancient Newar tradition of bonding families and communities by honouring aging as a divine status in Newar spiritual life. There are five levels of Bura Janko celebrations that gradually elevate senior people from human to divine status. The fifth Bura Janko ritual ceremony, completes the elevation of participants from human to full divine or “divinity” status so they will deserve their spiritual journey towards heaven. The five levels of Bura Janko celebrations are: Bhima-Ratha-Rohan when older adults reach 77 years, seven months, seven days, and seventh hour of age, Chandra-Ratha-Rohan (after seeing 1,000 full moon nights), Deva-Ratha-Rohan at 88 years, eight months, eight days and eighth hour of age, Mahadeva-Ratha-Rohan at 99 years, nine months, and ninth day of age, and Maha-Divya-Ratha-Rohan at 108 years, eight months, and eighth day of age. This study includes autoethnographic personal narratives and reflections on two Bhima-Ratha-Rohan Bura Janko celebrations held in Nepal in 1997 and in a typical Newar immigrant community in the United States in 2018. The other insights presented here are based on personal and participant observations in both Hindu and Buddhist traditions. No one has previously conducted such a study so this work will be of interest to many people including the academic community.

There are only a few published academic research articles about Bura Janko culture while other autoethnographic articles about Bura Janko are rigorously reviewed. This study presents perceptual and emotional experiences for the Bhima-Ratha-Rohan Bura Janko procession, for the symbolic meanings of cultural and spiritual values of Bura Janko, and for family bonds among celebrants of Bura Janko in Nepal and the United States. The study also uses creative and evocative narratives, self-reflections and participant-observation insights. Thus, the study concludes that Bura Janko ceremonies create a social network, harmonious intergenerational relation, and sharing and caring sacred environment as a higher level of consciousness of religion, philosophy, science, and spirituality altogether in the Newar culture to promote well-being and wellness among elders in any part of the senior-citizen communities in this planet.

**Key words:** Hinduism; Buddhism; Newar; Bura Janko; Bhima-Ratha-Rohan; Autoethnography; Divinity



Asato ma sadgamaya - Lead me from untruth to truth  
Tamaso ma jyotirgamaya - Lead me from darkness to light.  
Mrtyorma amrtam gamaya - Lead me from death to immortality  
(Brhadaranyaka Upanishad — I.iii.28)

## Chapter 1: Introduction

It is fascinating to see elderly people respected and honoured by their culture and its traditions and kinship structure including clans and genealogies. Kinship is universal and celebrations honouring old age include celebrating religion, caste, colour, and creed. These celebrations and rituals are universal human expressions of honour for elderly people is an essential key for ageing wellness. In Nepal, Bura Janko is one of these celebrations and is becoming increasingly popular among native Newar communities in Nepal and immigrant Newar communities in the United States. Bura Janko celebrations are also popular among American scholars in the United States and I have been fortunate to observe two different Bura Janko celebrations in Nepal and the United States.

In this study, I introduce Bura Janko in the first chapter and include appraisals of sacred scripture and medieval era sculpture and paintings about heritage culture (the medieval Newar Malla Kingdom from the 10<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> centuries). The second chapter presents a literature review despite very little research on this subject published by Western scholars. Chapter three shows the methods and limitation of this study. Chapter four presents personal observations and reflections on two first stage Bura Janko ritual celebrations held in Nepal and the United States and illustrates their cultural insights and human perceptions. Chapter Five discusses these points and the thesis conclusion describes Bura Janko celebrations in Nepal and the United States for the benefit of both Newar communities and Western scholars.

It is believed that Bura Janko is a pre-historic or Vedic-culture celebration which is almost 5,000 years old. According to the *Garga Samhita* (a Vedic scripture), Hindu Lord

Krishna<sup>1</sup> initiated this practice for his father Vasudev's age 88-years, eight months and eight-day birthday anniversary (personal communication with the family priest, 1997). It is an ancient cultural practice of South Asia, preserved only in the Newari culture of Nepal. In Newari culture located in the ancient Valley of Kathmandu in the form of three petite Himalayan kingdoms: Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur, this ritual and its celebration are believed to enhance wellness, happiness, and dignity among elders. Furthermore, Bura Janko is a ritual practice of spiritually and culturally based Hindu and Buddhist worship as part of a cultural commitment to care for elderly people at the level of the *divine status* phenomenon and as honoured superiors of the community. The Bura Janko celebration elevates the longevity, vitality and vivacity of an ageing life.

The Bura Janko ritual procession of celebration lasts 12 to 16 hours from early morning to late evening or night and includes several deities, a sacred fire, a parade of chariots, a festive dinner, gift exchanges, offerings, blessings, and cultural music and dance. The entire ritual procession and celebration of Bura Janko is preferably held in the home because of the purification and cleansing of this residence. However, Bura Janko ritual and celebration can also be conducted in a temple or a shrine in the presence of God and Goddess.

Planning for a Bura Janko celebration is a complex process which can take at least three months of preparation. There are consultations with an astrologer, family priest, and the celebrant's family including relatives from paternal and maternal sides of the family. It requires sons, daughters, grandsons, granddaughters, and close family relatives to make a final schedule to proceed with the ceremony. Each person in the family is assigned a specific role and responsibility. The astrologer determines the auspicious date for a Bura Janko celebration based

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<sup>1</sup>The Supreme Personality of Godhead in Hindu religion.

on the birth year, month, day, and time for the celebrant according to the horoscope of the lunar calendar. The family priest provides a list of essential requirements for procurement, guides the family, prepares professional and individual expertise for the procession and coordinates the entire Bura Janko. This celebration is a rare and a great fortune for the celebrant, their family, and the community itself. It inspires great pride by honouring and celebrating the lifetime achievements of the celebrant.

This autoethnographic study involves historical, scientific, and meaningful personal narratives combined with retrospective reflections about Bura Janko. No ethical issues will be raised, and no names disclosed as this is a public event where participants and celebrants will remain anonymous. This study will also generate a personal narrative and reflection by writing personal stories based on the observation of cultural engagement in the first “Bura Janko” called Bhima-Ratha-Rohan, which is a ritual celebration of Newari culture. Personal stories and narratives will be presented therapeutically.

That was the first time when I saw the Bura Janko ritual and celebration called Bhima-Ratha-Rohan (a commemoration of both a giant Chariot and Lord Sun to be mounted by the celebrant) which was held to honour the married couple whose husband turned 77-years, seven-months, seven-days, seven-hours, seven-minutes and seven-seconds. In both Hindu and Buddhist Newari culture, the wife’s social age is always counted equal to the husband’s age for Bura Janko rituals or celebrations. If a woman isn’t married or is a widow, her age is used. The first Bura Janko I observed was held on October 4, 1997, in the ancient *Nepal Mandala* of the Kathmandu Valley, Lalitpur in Nepal, South Asia. It was conducted in the Hindu tradition by two Hindu family *Rajopadhyaya* (*Deobhaju* Brahmin) priests. Last year, it was also my great fortune to be an eyewitness for another first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) of 77-

years, seven-months, seven-days, seven-hours and seven-minutes for a widow that was held on October 21, 2018, in a typical Buddhist immigrant Newari community at Portland, Oregon in the United States. This celebration was led by a Vajrayana Buddhist priest as recognized as one of the rare public Bura Janko festivals in the United States.

My idea and concept of carrying Bura Janko to Canada was accepted in 2014 to present on the special event for the resident with dementia in the long-term care home which was part of my study of Activation Coordinator/Gerontology at George Brown College in Toronto. I presented “Bura Janko” culture at a special event for the residents at the Toronto-based long-term care facilities at Leisure World Long-Term Care Home and Pine Villa Retirement Home as a field placement intern in 2014, at Baycrest Hospital in 2015 as a summer volunteer intern, and at Bendale Acres Long-Term Care Home as a volunteer in 2016.

I presented a paper about *Bura Janko* at Oxford Brookes University in England during the 10<sup>th</sup> Biennial International Conference of the Association for Anthropology, Gerontology and the Life Course held June 8-9, 2017. This presentation has gained attention and academic interest among fellow participant scholars because it was the first Bura Janko paper that was presented and discussed in an international academic forum. I received a positive and inspirational commentary and feedback to broaden my learning horizon about human diversity and culture in the world. Here is an excerpted constructive comment from Michelle Bentsman, Master of Divinity student at Harvard Divinity School.

“Hom Shrestha of Laurentian University gave an overview of the Nepalese Bura Janko ceremony, through which the elderly is elevated to the status of gods through a series of chariot rides into the divine realm. Shrestha emphasized their power to strongly increase the psychosocial well-being of seniors, urging such practices to become more widely integrated into elder care. These papers pointed to the influence that imaginative and ritual foregrounding can have on end-of-life processes and attitudes, affirming the potential for further inquiry into ageing, dying, and religion” (Bentsman, 2017).

Based on numerous personal communications with Bura Janko celebrants and review the Hindu sacred scriptures, I realize that celebration of Bura Janko enhances a trinity of metaphysical, spiritual and philosophical way of life. There are many elderly people suffer from such fear of death, ignorance of the meaning of life, and loneliness or depression from social isolation because of lack of societal, cultural and spiritual care policies and practices. Bura Janko is a means to fill this gap. It is also associated with noble *karma*; and a pathway to reach the final goal of human life that is referred to as “*moksha*” or “*nirvana*” (salvation). This status is achieved by the practices of a selfless or egoless lifestyle in combination with “*aatma chintan*” (self-reflection and introspection) and “*aatma jnana*” (higher level of self-knowledge and consciousness) which visualize the cosmic deity for a celebrant of the Bura Janko ceremony. I truly believe that Bura Janko navigates the middle path of physical (material) life and metaphysical (spiritual) life to attain the highest spiritual realization and humanism within family and community.

However, socially and culturally friendly modified Bura Janko practices in Canada can be positive initiatives to fill gaps in elderly people’s lives and promote ageing wellness. Bura Janko can reduce social isolation and loneliness and promote intergenerationally relations which enhance ageing wellness and share active wisdom among elderly people in the family and their communities.

### **Objective**

The core objective of this study is to introduce and demonstrate the ritual and celebration of the first “Bura Janko” (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan). This is done through self-observations, personal memories and insights, writing creative and evocative narratives and self-reflexivity based on my close observations and exposures as participant observation, reflections and

interpersonal communication of “Bura Janko” ceremonies held in Newari communities on October 4, 1997 in Nepal, and on October 21, 2018 in Portland, Oregon, the United States. This study will demonstrate every moment and detail of Bura Janko as an important way of fostering a greater sense of purpose for elderly adults, and therefore having a positive impact on their wellness and longevity.

Bura Janko is also a pristine concept towards a holistic wellness of older adults to create an awareness about Bura Janko in North America who have no life-cycle rituals to celebrate in their golden age as a celebration of a joyful and full of life.

### **Rationale and Justification**

This study is significant because exploring and writing about “Bura Janko” through autoethnography will benefit an understanding of the impact it has on the wellness of older adults. This is a new approach for the academic community in understanding Bura Janko. I belong to the Newari community and valued and preserves the ancestral traditions and cultural practices of spirituality, religiosity, and compassion. I have a deep concern for older adults and their physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, social and recreational well-being as a gerontology practitioner, knowledge-keeper, navigator and collaborator. As a gerontology student, I explore and broaden my learning horizon and share my knowledge and mind gravitation on cultural, spiritual and emotional aspect of aging wellness in a cosmic fashion. There is currently no autoethnography of Bura Janko. This study has the potential to generate greater interest in the academic community on Bura Janko and other rituals that honour older adults.

Bura Janko is a celebration which honours old age and is consistent with my passion to serve older adults. Honouring older adults through this celebration means they can flourish or in gerontological terms, they can lead active lives characterized by wisdom and positive aging. I

also understand that Bura Janko can create a joyful life marked by positive self-esteem and mental wellness at a lower-cost than any other approach to positive ageing.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The autoethnography study on Bura Janko is a new avenue for me as a matured gerontology student. It is a great academic challenge to me and my supervisor and committee members who do not have the experience in autoethnographic academic research. I observed the ageing process and ageing life in the broad lenses of gerontology and anthropology and attempted to influence academic community through this autoethnographic approach. However, it has been my blissful wish to create an intense interest and awareness of the Bura Janko as a global cultural resource to foster aging wellness; and invite multidisciplinary experts, scholars and researchers to participate and contribute in the further study. To-date, there has been only one academic article published on Bura Janko in 2014.

Appo Deepo Bhawo - Be a light unto yourself  
- *Buddha*

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The Bura Janko ritual and celebration has become popular among the modern Newari society in Nepal as well as in immigrant Newari communities in the United States. Also, scholars in the United States and Germany have replicated Bura Janko ritual in their lives and included their families and communities in this celebration. Bura Janko is a tangible cultural heritage for honouring old age preserves only in Newar community and culture in Nepal. Despite little academic literature about it, it is now both an ancient and contemporary ritual. The term “*Newar*” refers not only to the ethnic group, but also to their language. Among Newars, the Newar language is known as “*Nepalbhasha*” or *Newa bhay*,” literally, the language of medieval Nepal, which historically referred to the area of the Kathmandu Valley, an ancestral place of civilization of the Newars. Also, the term “*Newari*” to refer to the language of Newars (Birkenholtz, 2018, p.251).

For the purpose of this study, reference materials about Bura Janko have been gathered and presented under four major themes: Basics Concepts of Bura Janko, Descriptions of Bura Janko, Bura Janko Rituals for Celebrating Later Life, and Spiritual Meanings of Bura Janko. Very little, however, has been written about the Bura Janko celebration in Hindu and Buddhist tradition and culture by Western and Newari scholars and researchers. There has been a lack of attention and an absence of academic awareness and curiosity. However, I have extensively reviewed and used database searches of Age-line, Web of Science, Google Scholar and JSTOR publications for their content regarding keywords such as *Bura Janko*, *Bhima-Ratha-Rohan*, *honouring old age*, *ritual* and *spiritual ageing life*, *rites of passage*, *rituals of old age*, etc.; and



collected or borrowed Bura Janko procession scriptures from Hindu Newar Brahmin priests (Rajopadhyaya). Where possible, research articles about Bura Janko were collected, including a 2015 presentation about special events in Toronto-based long-term care facilities as an intern and volunteer. Since then, the author regularly monitors the news about Bura Janko celebration in Nepal published in daily local newspapers, blogs, memoir and memorabilia. I also receive updated information about Bura Janko celebrations from family, friends, and relatives; and uses personal memories collected from my wife, father, and mother-in-law. My sister-in-law also provided information about a rare fourth Bura Janko ceremony held in 2017 for the grandmother of her school classmate.

I had an extensive communication with Dr. Alexander Rospatt, International Buddhist religion scholar, regarding observatory comments on my Oxford Brookes conference paper in June 2017 in which I hypothesized these rites reduce cognitive decline by enhancing self-esteem and cognitive functions, and reduce memory loss in the both Hindu and Buddhist Newar communities in the Kathmandu Valley. I responded to his criticisms as follows:

First, there has not been any research study in the perspectives of gerontology and ageing care practice. As there is no such provision for the geriatric care or long-term care or senior hospital in Nepal to-date. Because of the first, second, third Janko, seniors benefit from feeling content and healthy, declining cognitive impairment and enhancing self-esteem and reduced potential dementia problem that reminiscence on social, spiritual, intellectual and emotional wellness as well as enhance ageing wisdom so forth. I am interested to do further gero-anthropological research and to develop a research proposal.

Dr. Rospatt did anthropological ethnographic field research of Bura Janko such as first, second and third Bura Janko for three elders with a couple on the attainment of the age of 77-years-7-days-7-hours, after seeing 1,000 full-moon days (between 81 and 84 years old) 88-years-8-months-8-days in the Vajrayana Buddhist Newar families between 1998 and 2009 respectively.

In addition, Rospatt (2014) recognized a similar ritual ceremony called "Bhima-Ratha-Shanti" (literally translates to Giant Chariot Peace Worship) among Tamil Brahmin (such as the Iyer community) in South India which is performed upon the completion of the 70th and 75th years of age not 77-years-7-months-7-days. The performing of this ritual seems to be rare in the Tamil Iyer community. Also, it is different than Bhima-Ratha-Rohan (77-years-7-months-7-days) in the Newar community of Nepal. Rospatt also refers to the oldest ritual handbook about Bura Janko procession and consecration which is a palm leaf manuscript that dates to 499 Nepala Samvat (1379 CE) that is considered the very earliest literary witnesses to Newari language.

Nevertheless, there was no further research completed, nor is there any record on the fourth and fifth Bura Janko ceremonies in Kathmandu Valley Newar community by any western scholars or Newar scholars or researchers. In January 2019, there was a rare but first world record of the fifth Bura Janko celebration of oldest senior lady Mayaju Maharjan on her completion of the age of 108-years-8-months-8-days on January 20, 2019, through Vajrayana Buddhist tradition (personal communication with Anita Joshi, January 2019).

It is important to note that Rospatt, in an article published in the South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies in 2014 wrote that the fifth Bura Janko is held at the age of 110-years, 10-months-10-days. This, however, is incorrect. The fifth Bura Janko is held at the age of 108-years, 8-months, 8-days and 8-hours. Two sources verify this. First is the recent celebration of the Fifth Bura Janko of Mayaju Maharjan at the age of 108-years-8-months-8-days-8-hours.

Second, the Rubin Collection of Paubha Inscriptions of N.S. 632 (AD 1512) states:

“Newar aged persons are consecrated five times at the interval on 77-years-7-months-7-days (Bhimaratharohan [in Sanskrit language]), 88-years-8-months-8-days (Deva-Ratha-Rohan [in Sanskrit language]), 99-years-9-months-9-days (Maha-Ratha-Rohan[in Sanskrit]), 108-years-8-month-8-days and 120 years. In between the first and second Bura Janko, a person completes a vision of 1,000 full moon nights in his life at the age of 83-years-4-months-4-days, the person is to be consecrated of mounting a moon-chariot

called Chandra-ratha-bhisekh or Chandra-ratha-rohan and called saharsha-chandra-darshan (vision of 1,000 moons” (Rubin Collection, 2017).

This mistaken assertion by Rospatt demonstrate how little the academic community understands Bura Janko; it also demonstrates how critical this paper is.

### ***Basics Concepts of Bura Janko***

Bura Janko is an ancient ritual and symbol of Newari civilization cultural, religious, and spiritual values. To perform a procession of the Bura Janko ritual and celebration, the manuals guideline for a Bura Janko procession is found in handwritten scriptures in the Sanskrit and Newari (Nepal Bhasha) languages used by Hindu and Buddhist priests. The ritual procession manual and guidelines of the first Bura Janko “Bhima-Ratha-Rohan” were handwritten in the Sanskrit and in the Newari (Nepal Bhasha) languages are available in the private possession of Hindu and Buddhist priests only. The Second and Third Bura Janko of Hindu tradition ritual procession manuals have been published in the Sanskrit, in the Newari (Nepal Bhasha) and Nepali languages. These include “Chandra-Ratha-Rohan (Moon Chariot Mounted Ceremony), Saharsha Chandra Darshan Bidhi (Full Moon Worship Procedure), Nikwagu Jyatha Janko (Second Bura Janko) by Newari Hindu Brahmin Pundit Bishnu Rajopadhyaya in 2010, and for the third Bura Janko at the age of 88-years-8-months-8-days “Maha-Ratha-Rohan Bidhi (Method of Maha-Ratha-Rohan) – third Bura Janko, 2001 written by Pundit Herambanada Rajopadhyaya in the Sanskrit and Nepali languages (Rajopadhyayas, 2001 & 2010). Both books are re-written based on the Vedic ritual scriptures.

### ***Descriptions of Bura Janko***

Bura Janko literally means “old age celebration.” *Bura* means an elder person (male or female). *Janko* means celebration, rites, or ritual in old age. The Bura Janko is a 5,000-year-old Hindu and Buddhist practice of spiritually and culturally-based worship-tradition practiced by

Newari people in the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. It preserves the ancient *Newari* tradition of bonding families and communities by honouring ageing as a divine status (Shrestha & Molohon, 2017). There is a popular adage among tourists and foreign people in Kathmandu Valley when they observe Bura Janko parade with palanquin and chariot surroundings in temples and shrines suggesting, “to get old in Nepal is to become a god.” Due to this noble affinity, every older adult in the Newari community expects at least first Bura Janko ritual ceremony in their life prior to leaving this world.

There is a collection of sculptures of the Bhima-Ratha-Rohan ceremony in the showroom of Rubin Museum of Art, New York. It was donated by Shelley and Donald Rubin who brought them from Nepal. It is an archaeological treasure of Nepal. The sculpture was built in approximately in the 1776 A.D. This reflects the culture of chariot ritual in Newari culture. This sculpture was originated in Nepal in 1776 with gilt copper, repoussé with dimensions of height 17.5 inches, width 11.5 inches and depth 3.75 inches. The Rubin Museum of Art (2018) describes the Bhima-Ratha-Rohan Chariot sculpture in the following statements:

“This exquisitely crafted gilded répuossé plaque depicts a special birthday celebration common to the Kathmandu Valley known as the Chariot Ritual. It is practiced by both Hindus and Buddhists when an elder reaches the age of seventy-seven. The festivities include the elder riding through the city on a chariot accompanied by the performance of various religious services in front of a sacred stupa.

To commemorate the birthday, Buddhists are also required to commission the construction of a stupa. However, if unable to build a full-size stupa, the family can sponsor a small three-dimensional or hammered metal sculpture or a painting of a stupa, of which this is an example. The presence of Manjushri, the Bodhisattva of Wisdom, at middle left and a monkey at the bottom left identify this stupa as likely representing a specific site, the famous Swayambhu Stupa of Kathmandu. A dedication inscription along the base dates the work to 1776.” (Rubin Museum, 2019).

Nepalese Buddhist paintings of the ritual of initiation performed for men and women when they reached the age of seventy-seven years, seven months and seven days (Sanskrit *bhīmaratha* or Newari *burà jyanko*) (Vergatti, 1999). On this occasion, both paintings and

bronzes are commissioned, and all surviving examples of such paintings are Buddhist (Vergati, 1999). This ritual was depicted in Nepalese paintings from the 15th to the 19th century. Vergati (1999) gives a detailed description of a painting dated 1433, which was restored in 1666, illustrating the celebration of this ritual in Kathmandu, by a family of Buddhist traders. From an iconographic point of view, it also shows the link between the goddess Usn̄savijayâ and the st̄upa of Svayambh̄u, the monument most popular among the Newar Buddhists. Besides their exceptional aesthetic qualities, the Nepalese paintings of the Malla period described in this article are cultural and historical documents (Vergati, 1999). These treasures demonstrate how the Hindu and Buddhist Newar preserve their culture through crafted sculpture or paintings as *Pauva* for the enlightenment of future generations.

Jest, Kansakar and Turin (2004) briefly explain how the first Bura Janko takes place on the completion of age 77 years, 7 months, 7 days, 7 hours which is called Bhim-ratharohan. Bhim means big or giant and *ratha* is a chariot the embodiment of the Sun God as a chariot. Bhima-Ratha-Rohan means to climb or mount a giant chariot to consecrate the first older-age ritual ceremony. This ceremony is performed in Hindu and the Buddhist Vajrayana traditions by a Buddhist and a Hindu priest, sometimes both. The procession *homa* or *yajna* (sacred or holy fire) is performed for peace and tranquillity of the environment. A homage or worship to *Navagraha* (the nine planets) mandala is performed to drive away evils, and Kalash puja (flask – a vessel used in worship to purify holy water) is also performed to pray for the blessing of Swayambhu Pancha Buddha (five Lord Buddhas) for the long life of the Bura Janko recipient. After the celebrants are dressed-up with a turban (only for husband) on his head and small round golden earrings (for both husband and wife), they will be paraded through the city on a palanquin (four-wheel cart with chariot) to various temples and they will be treated as

deities. Cultural and religious music will be played along the way in parading the chariot in temples and shrines. The celebrants will be welcomed back by their family, relatives and friends after the chariot procession with a ceremony at the entrance of the home. The welcome ceremony (*lasha-kusa*), will be performed by sons and grandsons, daughters and closer relatives through sprinkling holy water with milk, roasted rice and coins for the honoured couple. The celebrants will be offered *thaebwa* – a large silver plate with different varieties of food placed on it. Each food represents a deity and a cultural symbol. The traditional *sagun* or *sanga* (special sacred dish includes egg, fish, meat, wine or yogurt, ginger) is offered to celebrants by family members and relatives. Finally, celebrants offer money, food and clothes to the priests (Jest, Kansakar & Turin, 2004).

Rospatt (2014) compares Bura Janko to special birthdays in Western societies. Like birthdays, Bura Janko is an opportunity to honor and show respect for the celebrants. However, Bura Janko is a spiritual and cultural ceremony compared to the birthdays which are a celebration of an anniversary or of completion of so many years. In addition, birthdays are celebrated every year in Newar culture in a way that worships the planetary deities and the gods and goddess of one's lineage (Rosspat, 2014). Nonetheless, Bura Janko and special birthdays in the West are the best examples of honour and respect to the older adults.

### ***Rituals for Celebrating Life***

According to the Hindu and Buddhist mythologies in Newari culture, ten *samskaras* (rites of passages) are performed: the first is performed prior to birth and the last is performed after death. These include "*Jatakarma*" (childbirth purification ceremony), "*Namakaran*" (Naming the child), "*Annapraasan*" (First rice feeding ceremony or *Macha Janko*), "*Chudakarma*", or "*Kaeta Puja*", or "*Bratbabandha*" or "*Upanayana*" (first hair shaving and loin cloth ceremony or

sacred thread ceremony) which is traditionally performed for boys at the age of 5 to 13. There are two significant ceremonies related to the girl child in the Newari community. The marriage ceremony, *Ihi* or *Ehee* or Bel marriage (*Bel bibaha*) is a ceremony in which pre-adolescent girls are "married" to the bael fruit (wood apple), which is a symbol of the god Vishnu (Hindu Lord of Preserver) ensuring that the girl becomes and remains fertile and never be widowed culturally, if the girl's husband dies (Coon, 2010). The second marriage ceremony, *Bahra tayegu* or *Bahra chhuyegu* of the female children between the ages of 7 to 13 prior to the first menstruation, she is married to the Sun god in a 12-days ceremony (Coon, 2010). In Newari native language, *bahra* means a 'cave' and *teyegu* or *chhuyegu* mean "to put", thus *Bahra tayegu* is the ceremony where Newari girls are put in a "cave" for 12 days (Coon, 2010). The girl is kept in a dark room for 11 days to keep away from sunlight and males for the purification of the girl before her marriage to the Sun god on the 12th day. The other important ritual ceremonies are *bibaha* (wedding), and *mrityu* (death) rites or ceremonies. However, Bura Janko is exceptional and beyond the rites of passage, because it is an occasional and rare celebration in the family if older adults turn 77-years-7-months-7-days and 7 hours, after seeing 1,000 full moon days, 88-years-8-months-8-days and 99-years-9-months and 9-days respectively as a fortune of older adult and their family and community.

Bura Janko is the initiation into the old-age (Nepali, 1959, Lewis, 1994, Jest, Kansakar & Turin (2004). Rospatt (2014) describes Bura Janko as follows:

“... the series of old age rituals (known in Newari as *jya jamko*, a term that allows for different spellings) that are performed among the Newars when one has reached a particularly advanced age, namely 77 years, 7 months, 7 days, 7 ghatis (of 24 minutes each) and 7 palas (of 24 seconds each), or 88 years, 8 months, 8 days, etc. or 99 years, 9 months, 9 days, etc., or, according to some accounts, 110 years, 10 months, 10 days, etc., or when the elder ‘sees the thousandth full moon’, that is when he or she becomes 1,000 months old, which happens between 81 and 84 years of age.”

To accomplish these ritual ceremonies, Rospatt insists family and friends are not enough, but rather, many professional individuals or experts including priests (Hindu Brahmans and Buddhist Vajracharyas), who act as recipients of ritual presents or donations (*dana*) also need to be involved. In addition, there are musicians who accompany the ritual performance and procession, potters who prepare the ritual vessels, sweetmeat makers who produce special pastries, carpenters who fashion the wooden chariots or palanquins, and chitrakars who paint these conveyances, pots and other ritual items and who may also execute commemorative scroll paintings serving as the central icon for the ritual (Rospatt, 2014 & Foley, 2013). Thus, Bura Janko is considered a rare sacrament in the both Hindu and Buddhist Newar tradition. The celebrant assumes close-to-divine status, loses the fear of death, and no longer experiences bad fortune.

### ***Spiritual Meanings of Bura Janko***

The Bura Janko ritual and celebration is a journey of spiritual life. After the celebration of Bura Janko, celebrants are less fearful of death and feel elevated from human to divine status. Rospatt (2014) concludes that the Bura Janko ritual and celebration allows elders to assume their divine identity after climbing or mounting a ceremonial *ratha* (chariot) to reach the divine world with fortune, happiness and a healthy long life. The Bura Janko ritual creates great pride and a sense of the sacred identity in terms of ethical, cultural and spiritual values. In the third Bura Janko (Deva-Ratha-Rohan or Maha-Ratha-Rohan at the aged of 88-years-8-months-8-days), the celebrant enters the home through the window of the first floor via a ramp, situated near the main door. This special entrance via a window symbolizes a pathway to heaven and the continuum of spiritual life.



I observed a YouTube video about the rare fourth Bura Janko which is called Mahadev-Ratha-Rohan or Dibya-Ratha-Rohan and occurs at the age of 99-years-9-months-9-days of Nhuchhe Maya Shakya of Lalitpur and Chhala Maya Shakya of Bhaktapur (Nepal Television & Nepal Mandal Television, 2017). This video presents the rare ceremonies and procession in Vajrayana Buddhist tradition in Nepal. Both celebrants were placed in a huge clay pot made as a womb and at end of the sacred ritual procession, a hole was broken on the pot and they were symbolically, “reborn.” Both fourth Bura Janko celebrants were shown expressing their happiness surrounded by many grandchildren in the video. According to the YouTube video, everyday 100-year old Nhuchhe Maya Shakya still chants the *Prajna-Paramita* (perfection or transcendent of wisdom) *sutras* (hymns) in Mahayana Buddhism. It is the best example of the intellectual and spiritual wellness in her life.

Several studies (Gurdzen, 2018; Address, 2017; Tsuji, 2011; Briller & Sankar, 2011) conclude that ritual, religious, and spiritual pathways promote a positive and meaningful life with transcendence and improved quality of life of the older adults. These studies also conclude that rituals connect and integrate family, neighbourhoods, and communities. Similarly, Bura Janko expands social threads and connectedness in family and community.

### ***Revitalization, Spiritual, Intellectual and Emotional Wellness***

According to Coon (2007, 2010 & 2017), and celebrants 100 years old Nhuchhe Maya Shakya and Chhala Maya Shakya of fourth Bura Janko, the Bura Janko ritual improves spiritual, intellectual and emotional wellness and revitalization of a meaningful life and active wisdom among the older adults. The psycho-social impact of being the honored celebrant and center of attention of the Bura Janko is positive.

Coon (2007, 2010 and 2017) also portrays how she offered a gift to her father's 80<sup>th</sup>, 84<sup>th</sup> and 88<sup>th</sup> of birthdays by hosting the celebration of first Bura Janko in Buddhist Newar tradition (with American adaptations) in her United States hometown. She also accomplished the second and third Bura Janko of her father and mother in 2010 and 2015. Her parents, seated on palanquins (*chariot*) decorated with winged horses, were paraded around the garden and joined in a feast, followed by speeches, songs, and music that prompted guests to express respect and to offer a blessing. Coon (2015) concludes that Bura Janko reinforces family solidarity, love for one another, and the value of their elders which enhances their quality of life, and happiness. She indicated guests had tears in their eyes and told her that it was one of the most meaningful occasions of their lives and an unforgettable memory.

Another resource on Bura Janko is the memoir souvenir entitled "*Kesar Lall: A Homage on occasion of his Bura Janko.*" This book, edited by Mark Turin, who is a renowned linguistic anthropologist was dedicated to friend and scholar Kesar Lall on the commemoration of his first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) held in 2004. This publication includes articles written by over 25 world-renowned scholars and researchers, including David Gellner, Jim Fisher and Christoph Cupper. Kesar Lall was the author and publisher of over 50 books in English. Turin reviewed the last book of Kesar Lall entitled '*Reflections*' - ageless wonder (English Poem) a poetic masterpiece, which started to write after the first Bura Janko at the age of 77-years-7-months-7-days in 2004. It was published in 2006 at the aged of 81 years. His Bura Janko celebration inspired and energized him with a divine power to activate his body, mind and spirit to complete such a great work. On his reflection, Turin captured the words "an open mind without pride and prejudice is a blessing" which Kesar Lall himself wrote in his preface. In his book, he captures sentiments on changing seasons that convey the joy and wonder of a child at

the age of 81 (three years after the Bura Janko) (Turin, 2006 & 2013). Thus, the best documented example of the revitalization of life in terms of intellectual, emotional and spiritual wellness is Kesar Lall. The candid spirit of Kesar Lall is a great sign to the academic community as well.

Peter and Emily Hess of Germany celebrated their first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) in April 2018 in the Newar tradition and culture in Nepal at the ancient Bhaktapur city. The couple were proud to revive a dead or lost tradition of an old age by a ritual in Germany (Rasic, 2018). It inspired them to dedicate their lives to the research of their hidden culture and the tradition of old age rituals and celebrations in Germany and throughout Europe.

Paropakaraya Punyaya, Papaya Para Peedanam  
Helping others is virtue, and hurting others is a sin  
Veda Vyas

### Chapter 3: Methods

“The autoethnography is an approach to research and writing to describe and systematically analyze (graphy) personal experience (auto) to understand cultural experience (ethno)” (Ellis, Adams & Bochner, 2011). It is about the connection between social science and human culture that promotes moral and ethical values in everyday life.

I was inspired by the Ellis and Bochner’s chapter 28, entitled “*Autoethnography, personal narrative, reflexivity: Researcher as subject*” (2000). Ellis explained the principles of autoethnography within a dialogue with Sylvia. Her graduate student Sylvia asked, “So if I understand you correctly, the goal is to use your life experience to generalize to a larger group or culture,” and Carolyn answers, “Yes but that’s not all.” The goal is also to enter and document the moment-to-moment, concrete details of a life” (2000, p. 737). My goal for this study was to focus and document every moment and the detail of the Bura Janko ceremony personally witnessed so that others will be able to understand it.

Heewon Chang’s book “*Autoethnography as a method*” (2008), identified three types of data, personal memories, self-observation, and external data (p.13) as an integral part of the autoethnographic method. The research design and methods, included personal narratives, writing stories, self-stories and retrospective observation or reflections on Bura Janko that illustrated cultural practice, beliefs and values for helping insiders (cultural group or community) and outsiders (cultural visitors or guests or researchers) to obtain a better understanding of the culture of Bura Janko.

As suggested by Ellis, Adams, and Bochner (2011), to write autoethnography, I have created an aesthetic and evocative in terms of emotional, therapeutic and creative detail of personal and interpersonal experiences through cultural engagement and storytelling with insightful queries. For this purpose, the Bura Janko ceremony was a good choice to narrate or reflect on in an autoethnographic style. The research design focused primarily on retrospective observation and reflections on Bura Janko celebrations which occurred in the past. The retrospective process of observation and reflection fostered insightful views and interpersonal communication in terms of culture and social media have been reviewed.

My core research question was “*have you ever envisioned your grandparents as highly respected and treated them with dignity in their golden years*” and focused in the contextual frame of communication and culture aspects of Bura Janko practices in the Newar society (both Hindu and Buddhist) in Nepal, South Asia. In South Asia, only the Newar society preserves and practices these ancient cultures as cultural heritages. These are magnificent in terms of archaeological, historical, cultural, spiritual, and intellectual and scientific studies in our life.

The purpose of this study was to rediscover meaning and contemporary approaches of Bura Janko in terms of emotional, spiritual and therapeutic experiences, and to illuminate cross-cultural values for the academic community. The study involved observations of Bura Janko celebrants, their close family members who led the celebrations, and other supportive workers, priests, family-friends and scholars. The materials included photographs, YouTube videos, artworks, self-observational data, memoir, souvenirs, symbolic representation (materials), insight inner-experiences, blogs, news, etc. This study also explored the cross-cultural values of older adults in terms of gerontological and anthropological lenses. This was done to further interdisciplinary assistance to research in the future. My beloved wife was a key informant and

source of this study as a former university graduate student of Nepal Bhasa (Newari linguistic) and Newar culture, who led the successful first and second successful Bura Janko of her father and mother, and third Bura Janko of her mother. In addition, the author was engaged in stream-of-consciousness free writing, making notes on observations on senses of sight, smell, touch, and sound which related to Bura Janko culture and remembrances of his first Bura Janko celebration experience that took place twenty years ago. The qualitative writing was about making choices and creating narratives and subtext while maintaining my own voice as a witness, participant-observer and reflective reviewer of the Bura Janko events.

*The world of imagination is the world of eternity.  
It is the divine bosom into which  
we shall all go after death of the vegetive body.  
– William Blake<sup>2</sup>*

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Personal Narratives, Observations and Reflections**

The Kathmandu Valley was, at least from the third century CE (current era) and possibly earlier, an outpost of the Hindu-Buddhist Newar civilization of the Gangetic plains (Gellner, 2016). Bura Janko has been regarded as a treasure of Newar civilization since then. I observed the Bura Janko tradition and culture as the foundation of humanism and culture at a higher level of consciousness of the Newar society.

### **First Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) – Personal Narratives and Reflections**

My father and mother-in-law belong to Lalitpur – a cosmic metropolitan city known in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the medieval city of art and devotion. Their ancestors served in high-level ministerial posts in the Malla kingship in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The couple is the first generation in their long genealogical pathways that received such divine fortune to have the celebration of first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan), which was consecrated on their first aged ritual ceremony of 77-years-7-month-7-days-7-hours-7-minutes-7-seconds held on October 4, 1997. The Bura Janko is more than a rite of passage; it is a tangible cultural heritage of the Newar people. It is with a great fortune that I was able to observe and participate in this meditative spiritual existence and spiritual living mind.

This was taking place before my wedding to their daughter on February 6, 1998. Their daughter was my classmate in high-school in the late 1980s. She was the third child in the

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<sup>1</sup>The spiritual universe – how quantum physics proves the existence of the soul, p.230.

family and was the only one who was unmarried. She led the entire Bura Janko ritual ceremony and started planning and preparing a year prior. She consulted with an astrologer to fix the auspicious date which was time-based on her father's birth day time and horoscope under the lunar calendar. I was proud and blessed to become a part of this family.

Prior to the ritual ceremony of September 3, 1997, was an astonishing procession of *Bayar Shraddha* (worship to ancestors with palm fruit). This was to invite all ancestors including paternal and maternal families through worshipping and offering 108 *Bayar* (palm fruit). The procession is performed through the family priest at home. It also offers holy water, rice, wheat flour, beaten rice, red and yellow powder, sandal paste, flowers, *naivaidya* (beaten rice, salt, sweet, piece of ginger) and *Panchamrit* (milk, ghee, honey, sugar and *Sakha* (brown sugar) milk, yogurt, through lighting *sukunda* (antique oil lamp for religious purposes only), which has the inscription of Lord Ganesh—God of bestowed of success. Everyone gathered and decorated two palanquin carts (chariot) with symbolic flyers of gods and goddesses. The flowers include *Hypericum Uralum*, *Rhododendron arboretum*, and *Thuja occidentals* that were used to decorate the chariot. Also, the sacred leaf of religious trees Peepal (*Ficus relegiosa*), Bar (*Ficus bengalenses*), Tulsi (*Ocimum tenuiflorum*), Dubo (*Cyanodon dactylon*), lotus leaf (*Nelumbo nucifera*) and cow milk is used in the ceremony. The flowers used include, Ajuswan or yellow jasmine (*Jasmine humile*), moo swan (*Origanum majorana*), dhagan swan (*Artemisia indicia*), marigold flowers, banana leaf and plant, commonly used in the worship of God and goddess. Marigold is popular as the 'herb of the sun' that represents passion and creativity. Flowers have been an integral part of the Bura Janko ritual to offer to gods, goddess and deities. The wide varieties of flowers, such as Pale Swan (flower of organic gourmet highland tea), Jee Swan (cumin flower), hakugu aparajit swan (black clitoria ternatea), bhunji



paleswan (luffa acutangular), tuyugu swan (white flower), Hyaungu Kalihi swan (red flower), tuyugu kaliswan or daphan swan (white flower or), hyaungu pale swan (chu dugu) (red parijat flower or night-flowering jasmine with root, Karnikar Swan (*pterosperumum acer folium*), Champak Swan (champak flower or *Magnolia champaca*) are special flowers of the ritual. The other essential items are gan (ritual bell), *sukunda* (a ritual lamp), kalas, sinha-mu (red-powder of the tiny pot), jwonla nhyakan (silver mirror) for the worship to deities in the procession of Bhima-Ratha-Rohan. The *homa yajna* (sacred fire) was made of 720 half-cooked raw bricks which signifies 365 days and 365 nights) of ritual ceremony, *mandala* and more than 33 *kalas* (flask vessel) in the form of deities. The *kalas* are made of clays which are put into the body of a god and goddess during the ritual. Most of all *kalas* are painted by the professional or occupational painters (*Chitrakar*) and use various symbols to portray the deity of each *kalas* belonging to each god and goddess in the *mandala* and *homa*. This symbolizes enlightenment and spiritual awakening for the worship of the Lord Sun and other planetary gods and goddess simultaneously.

The entire community consisting of family members, relatives, friends, and neighbourhood of celebrants were proud to be receiving blessings from both celebrants. The celebrants were congratulated by guests and invitees on the dinner feasts. It was a cultural program; this ceremony brings enthusiasm which helps in healing the heart and the soul. All were excited to observe the initiation of the procession of first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) of celebrants (my father and mother-in-law), the *thakali* (the senior-most among the members of patrilineal family) and *thaklali-Naki* (wife of thakali) both *las-kus* (ritual welcome). The celebrants are carrying a big key, flowers and rice on their palms. They move through the procession room and are seated in special cushion, i.e., *chakati*. The Thakali and Thakali-Naki

cover the head and body of the celebrants with white cloth and the priest reads the Vedic *mantra* while sprinkling the celebrants with holy water (*Ganga-Jal*) to bath and purify. The *Ganga-Jal* was brought by the celebrants during their pilgrimage or spiritual tour in Kasi, Varanasi in India 30 years ago. Both celebrants changed into their new costumes. The nail-cutting ceremony was held by the local nail cutter lady to cut their nail in both hands and legs with traditional red-coloured in both the legs.

The priest and assistant priest began the Vedic *homa* (sacred fire) ceremony by burning the small pieces of wood and an offering of ghee and varieties of grains, cow milk, and *dapha swan* (sacred flowers) and *Ganga-Jal*. It looks like a *Yagna* (worship or sacrifice to the god of fire by Vedic sages). In Hindu mythology, during the Bura Janko, the priest invites god of fire by worshipping *Homa* (sacred fire) which relates to the fire of the mind or mindfulness and invites god of air relates to *prana*, the breath, and the practice of *pranayama* or breath-control. In Veda, Sun is prayed and chanted which is translated as: “We meditate upon the Divine Creative Sun (Savitar) that he may give inspiration to our intelligence (III.62.10) (Frawley, 1995).

The world’s oldest Sanskrit holy scripture Rig Veda said: “we set you down, oh sacred fire, at the holiest place on Earth, in the land of Ila, in the clear brightness of the days. On the Drishadvati, the Apaya and the Saraswati rivers, shine out brilliantly for men” (III.23.4) and “you, oh sacred fire, are the first living one for living men. God made you like the lord of the peoples of Nahusha. They made Ila the teacher of men (I.31.11).” (Frawley, 1995). Similarly, there was almost 33 *Kalas*- a source of vitality, which was kept around the sacred fire for the worship of ritual deities. The *kalash* including *Naga Kalash* (serpent flask vessel), which is made of small clay with the contribution of the potter, painter and priest towards purification of the Bura Janko ceremony.

Significantly, the family priest transformed the *kalash* into deities, which is done through the Tantric way or method. After these transformations are complete, the Thakali-Naki worship the celebrants. The largest *kalash* in worship is called the *Biz kalash*. The vessel is unique to the Bura Janko rite and is the embodiment of the *Vajra* (lightning bolt). This *kalash* is painted of deities and larger than others. Both celebrants kept the *biz kalash* after completion of Bura Janko as a symbol of their seniority and divine status in the community.

In this culture, the recipient of Bura Janko is not actually a divine god; but receives the respect of a divine status as close as a human can get to the elevation of a god. It is a very powerful object to the Bura Janko celebrants reflecting his and her semi-divine and social privilege.

Both celebrants changed their dress and wore jewelry, including golden earrings and necklaces with a red silk colourful sari and Daura sural (typical Newar dress of father-in-law). The priest carried out the worship with Vedic *mantra* to worship Lord Ganesh, Lord Sun, Astamatrika (eight divine mother goddess) namely: Brahmani, Vaishnavi, Maheshwari, Indrani, Kaumari, Varahi, Chamunda, and Mahalaxmi) and nine planetary deities, such as: Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus, Saturn, Rahu and Ketu, etc. with *Mandala* worship. Lord Ganesh is an elephant head of Lord who removes any obstacle prior to initiating any ritual ceremonies.

Both celebrants, take seven steps in the *panko pata* (betel leaf) with betel nut to sit on the decorated chariot; one for father-in-law and one for mother-in-law at the astrological time at 9.30 am in the morning auspicious time of 77-years-7-months-7-days-7-hours-7-minutes. It is also believed that Lord Buddha takes seven steps after birth on this earth. The thakali and thakali-Naki use yo-mari, taula (sesame mixed with brown sugar, grains of rice), a piece of fruits, coin,

flowers and red-powders go into the huge wooden pot of eight kilograms, showering pieces of fried white rice, flowers (*tyaa*) coins and several grains over the head of both celebrants.

The role of *thakali* and *thakali-Naki* is ritually significant. According to Sanskrit scholar Gautam Bajra Vajracharya, the *thakali* uses “*upavita*”, originally meant “a shawl-like garment or hide worn diagonally covering the left shoulder.” Such a manner of wearing a shawl in *upavita* style is still prevalent among the Newars in a religious context since pre-Vedic era (Vajracharya, 2013, p.167).

In Bura Janko, chariots represent the transportation mode of respected elderly adults as they are elevated from human to divine status. The *Bhima-Ratha-Rohan* literally means to ride the giant chariot of Lord Sun. The chariot of Lord Sun is a giant god with seven horses and seven colours called *Bhima-Ratha*. Riding a chariot of Lord Sun is that of a ritual procession to surpass the critical death zone safely from the sword of death (*khadgo*).

The celebrant passing of five sets of numbers going from 7 to 8 are believed the first inauspicious or death zone. In Newar astrology, it is believed that the number 8 is *ashuva* or ominous, or possible life-threatening circumstances can occur. In traditional Newari culture, *chyay haiku* occurs when reaching across from seven to eight in terms of age, month, day, hour, minute and second respectively. To overcome death and begin the divine life, the procession of *Bhima-Ratha-Rohan* takes place to worship the Lord Sun. After worshipping Lord Sun, planetary god and goddess, *agan dyo* and *digu dyo* (lineage god or ancestral god), the celebrant is elevated from human to divine status. Also, the Vedic people believed that Surya (the sun god) and solar divinities were constantly watching, and the followers of the sun cult expressed their wish for long life with the prayer “May we see sunrise for hundred years” (Vajracharya, 2013, p.14).

After sitting in colourful chariots, both express a thousand-megawatt smile with an extraordinary brightness of pride. Both were well dressed in garlands of marigolds and garlands of Yo-Mori (favourite sweet) which looks like a Laxmi Narayan (Lord Vishnu and Goddess Laxmi) and shared the 'enjoyment' with daughters and grandchildren. Yo-Mari is also a symbol of *Pancha-Tatwo* (five elements of life) which consists of fire, aqua, air, sky and land in making up the body. Rice flour represents land, molasses is taken as fire, water as aqua, empty space in *Yo-Mari* as the sky and sesame seeds represent air. They all combine to add a spiritual phenomenon to the process of successful transformation to old age.

The family members, mainly daughter, son-in-law, and niece bow down and touch the couple's feet with their forehead to show respect for their new divine status. All the bad *karmas* are removed by holy *karma*. To remove ego and sustain consciousness and wisdom, the priest performs a *homa* (sacred fire) to worship the god of fire to maintain cosmic consciousness in mind and in the heart of the celebrant. The celebrant mounts the chariot in keeping with the Sun God and parading. The son and daughters get together to pull the chariot or palanquin. The Sun God considered as a giant is called Bhima, and Ratha is called chariot of seven-horses that carry to divine world.

The garlands of Yo-Mari reminds me of my childhood, when at 8 or 9 years-old I used to go with friends to neighbourhoods to beg and eat Yo-Mari on every year at *Yomari Punhi* (full moon day of Yo-Mari) in neighbourhood; one of the popular festivals of the Newar community of Nepal celebrates on the full moon day of December which is the shortest day in Nepal. Yo-Mari is a steamed dumpling which is made from rice flour with *Chaku* (a kind of sweet and solid molasses and crushed sesame seeds) filling in conical or narrowed long shape. This festival is celebrated with the wish and hope for a better life and prosperity with a traditional masked

dance. The worship includes chanting and traditional rhyme by youth, teens and children altogether:

Tya Chhin Tya  
 BakachhinnTya  
 Lata Pata Kulechan  
 Juchhin Tya Yomari Chwamu - *Yo-Mori is long*  
 Uki Dune Haku – *inside the black sweet*  
 Byusa Maku - *if you give, it sweets or sugary*  
 Mabyusa Phaku – *if you don't give, it would be sour*  
 Byumha Lyase – *giver would become a teen or young*  
 Mabyumha Buri Kutu – *non-giver would become an older and older*

Both celebrants walk by foot to *parikrama* (paraded) and worship in the temple and shrines without chariot or palanquin. They were both physically and mentally active and did not bother to have anyone pull or carry the chariot or palanquin. After the worship and paying homage in the local temple of Lord Ganesh and Purna Chandi (Divine Mother Goddess), both celebrants returned home immediately to start the blessing ceremony. The son, daughter-in-law, daughters, sons-in-law, grand-children and brothers or sisters have priority to offer worship with holy water and milk to the celebrants and offer gifts and accept blessings from them. All enthusiastically participated worshipping both of their feet with flowers, water (holy water). I bowed down to both and touched their feet with my forehead, prayed for their long-life and complete wellness and for their blessing to get married to their daughter; and got red *tikka* and *dakshina* (a gift of the coin) from both celebrants. It was a five-rupee silver coin which I saved as a memorable gift in my life. It was a symbol of accepting me as their future son-in-law and removal of barrier to marital relation with their daughter. The moment I bowed down and touched the feet of both celebrants (father and mother- in-law) with my forehead, it was spiritual and uplifting. Both were happy and blessed me as I offered coins. I was emotional

and my eyes were full of joyful tears and felt at peace for accepting me as their future son-in-law.

The celebrants offered a gift with jewelry ring and *tilhari* (gold with beads), clothes, grains, bed, etc. to the couple priest (husband/wife) as *dampati pooja* (couple worship). The priest couple expressed their gratitude for the gifts and rewards. Afterwards, the scene of *Thayabhu* (big plate with varies of sacred dishes with yogurt) to feed both celebrants together in one plate was mesmerizing. Similarly, the *Khen Sanga* (sacred dish) of duck egg with a piece of buffalo meat, lentil pancake, fish, ginger and yogurt as the good luck for the rest of their life was offered by brother and sister family members. *Sanga* symbolizes a balance of five elements of earth, fire, wind, water and sky as an integral part of the body to safety and prosperity.

**Betari Chikyu Ceremony (offering Turbine of white cloth):** The maternal relatives of my father and mother in-law and their married daughters jointly offered and covered the head by a turbine (long white cloth) for father-in-law and his son to honour and respect the family and community. The ceremony was a huge success because of their daughter's dedication and tireless effort, compassion and generosity for their parents. She always bows to her father and mother's feet after waking up in the morning and respects them as 'living god and goddess.' It is always the daughter who takes responsibility for household chores and internal and external home affairs rather than the son. She was playing the role of guardian for her parents, because she is an expert to maintain good public relation and handled father's 60 years old traditional Ayurvedic Store as well as family properties. More than 1,000 family friends and guests are invited for the traditional dinner, *Suku* or *lapate bhaye* (sitting at pad of paddy leaf and eat on dry leaf plate) with varieties of foods, including *Sanya-Khulna* (spicy jellied fish soup), *Takhā* (jellied buffalo meat curry), sweets, beaten rice, yogurt, *chohon* (bamboo shoot), along

with *Ayala* (local wine) and *thon* (local rice beer). The foods were delicious, and everyone enjoyed feasting and dancing to loud music with the high voltage of lights until 11 pm; it was like a wedding dinner feast (Pradhan, 2015). This tradition is now replaced by a western culture dinner buffet party.

The last procession is to worship the *chhwasu dyo* ((god of garbage) of the Bura Janko celebration. After completion of Bura Janko, *chhwasu dyo*, a god responsible for certain kinds of tainted materials to keep a safe environment and cultural ecology. It is also a significant part of the ceremony that ‘*chhwasu dyo*’ the deity who is responsible for cleansing the earth. It protects the community as well as the planet from the contamination of the environment by garbage or waste from the Bura Janko ceremony. It has been duty of Newar culture to preserve and maintain the natural environment. The cleansing of the earth is symbolic of the cleansing of body, mind and soul.

After the Bura Janko, the celebrants appeared younger, filled with a sense of inner-peace and happiness. Next week, October 10, 1997, early in the morning at 6 am, I went to see both the celebrants to pay respect and courtesy. I bowed down to them both and said, “*Bhagiya*” (Hello with bow-down). Both said “*Bhagyamani Juima.*” They were asked if they saw any dream or reflection of something new or a chariot tour in the sky at or around the ceremony. Both have said, they had a deep sleep and heard celestial sounds and saw inner blurry colourful lights that revealed the true divine consciousness, they felt they were on an inner pilgrimage or a spiritual journey. It is also believed that the first Bura Janko is the first stage of divinity; it is a time to depart from family responsibilities and obligations.

Many days later, several people, well-wishers, came to see them, asking for their blessings at the start of a new businesses, a new home, as well as social and cultural gatherings.



Both celebrants were invited and respected as “*Thakali*” senior head in the family and community. They resolved critical family conflicts and create harmonious atmosphere between family and communities through their matured experiences and spiritual knowledge and practices. After successful completion of the Bura Janko ceremony of both celebrants, I married their daughter on February 6, 1998, with a ritual wedding ceremony “*kanyadan*” (sacred offer of a daughter to groom by father) in Hindu tradition with a ritual procession and performed *homa* by the family priest. The *kanyadaan* symbolizes a deep religious connection between bride and groom. The groom is considered a representation of Lord Vishnu (Lord of Protector or Preserver) all through the wedding, and during *kanyadaan* the parents are offering their daughter, a considerable piece of their existence, for his taking. It is to be the greatest offering one can present to the Supreme Being and it is believed that upon *kanyadaan* the parents of the bride are pardoned of all their earthly sins, and are said to attain *moksha*, relief from the cycle of birth, death and rebirth. It was a gift of God with divine blessing. It was very emotional for both father and mother in law when they handed-over their daughter to me as donating a piece of their heart with what seemed to me like an ocean of tears in their eyes. *Na bhuto na bhabisyati* (never in the past nor in the future) happened at this divine wedding after Bura Janko. It was a blessing of Divine Mother Goddess Swasthani (Divine Mother Goddess). It was a great consequence of my one-month fasting and worship after 20 years. My father and mother in-law also felt relief after a successful wedding ceremony.

After completion of this first Bura Janko, my father-in-law played a catalytic role as the spiritual and honourable mentor and ceremonial advisor to the relatives, friends and the entire community. He provides donation of funds and his time to advocate for the cultural

revitalization of Bura Janko ceremonies. His intent is that the ceremonies act as therapy for the frustrated and vulnerable elderly adults yet to be honored or blessed with such rites.

In terms of gerontological and anthropological perspectives, my father-in-law provided me with a model for life after Bura Janko. He demonstrated traditional knowledge, wisdom, and cultural and moral values that impact every aspect of life. He showed me, and others, what it means to put the welfare of the family first, to have a healthy life style, and to flourish spiritually, mentally, and physically. He continued this path until his death. His pathways were enhancing the social inclusion through meaningful participation in a religious life or spiritual growth; the relationship between meaningful social roles and well-being/wellness; and the effect of social isolation on cognitive decline/dementia.

**Link between Bura Janko and marriage ceremony:** Prior to Bura Janko and the wedding ceremony, my wife was my classmate, from 1977-1980. After helping her with high-school graduation exam, I just could not say goodbye to her, and could not ask about her home. It was because I was a shy and soft-spoken boy at that time. I liked her with all my heart and soul because she was the only girl in the class who spoke to me and offered me tea or a snack (sometimes) during lunch break.

In Nepal, every year, on the full moon day from January to February, I read the Hindu Swasthani Brata Katha (The Story of the Ritual Vow to the Goddess Swasthani) which is a tale recited every day for a month every night with family members. It is a month-long ritual that includes fasting and devotional storytelling performed by women and sometimes men for the family welfare. It is also performed to wish for a good husband and wife. It was with the childish wisdom of a 15-year-old, I performed the one-month fasting worship of Divine Mother Goddess Swasthani. It was with the fervent desire to see her again and get married to her in the

future. After completion of my one-month fasting worship, I prayed to see her. But I did not see her for many years. I believed that I was the only foolish man to perform one-month fasting for a girl.

It is believed that the sacred Swasthani Brata Katha was written for the first time in the Sanskrit language in the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1573 A.D.) and translated into Newari or Nepal Bhasa (my mother tongue) at the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century (1603 A.D.). In 1985, Professor Linda Iltis did her Ph.D. dissertation, “The sacred book story of Swasthani Vrata: Newar Women and Ritual in Nepal” includes a full translation of the Newari version of the Swasthani Vrata Katha. It was a study of women and ritual practice in Nepal and a textual study of a primary religious narrative of Nepal about the Goddess of Own Place, Swasthani. Dr. Iltis is now an Assistant Director of Academic Services at Henry M. Jackson School of International Studies at University of Washington, Seattle, Washington. I communicated with her in 2012 about writing a biography of the late family priest. The family priest was one of her research advisors and sacred dance teachers. Later, my wife wrote and published an autobiography of the family priest in the Nepali language entitled “*Rajopadhyaya Triwikram Jwalananda Shukla: Smriti Puspanjali*” (Triwikram Jwalananda Shukla: A Memorable Floral Tribute) – Memorial Souvenir of a pioneering Cultural Advocate (Vedic and Tantric) (Amatya, L., 2012). I always admired Dr. Iltis as a foreign scholar and researcher as she translated Swasthani sacred book from Newari (Nepal Bhasa) to English. She also studied Nepal Bhasa for her Ph.D. program. I am also proud that another research scholar Dr. Jessica Vantine Birkenholtz from the University of Chicago did her Ph.D. in 2010 on Swasthani Bratha Katha. It demonstrates that Swasthani Bratha Katha is still popular among Nepalese women in the twenty-first century as it is historically, religiously and culturally maintained Hindu tradition in Nepal.

My one-month fasting (just one meal each day with milk, vegetable, fruits and sweet) and worship to Divine Mother Goddess Swasthani was not successful and I did not see her for almost 18 years, not even in my dream. After a long time or almost 18 years, my worship came true and I met her coincidentally with the support of the “Lahmi” marriage matchmaker. In mid-May 1997, early morning, my priest friend brought me to see brides or girls for marriage at the home of male “Lahmi.” In social and cultural practice, Lahmi normally should be a woman in our Newar society. He was almost 70-years old and was a romantic older marriage matchmaker. He showed me several photographs of the bride girls. Finally, he showed me the list of the girl’s names. One name caught my eye; the name of my school classmate. The Lahmi had no photograph of her, but he did not want to lose his first morning client (author), and he got ready to take me and my friend to see her and go to her house. I and my friend were waiting outside her house for almost an hour. The Lahmi went inside the house and talked with the girl and her parents. After an hour, Lahmi brought us into the house. Her parent welcomed us, but I felt uncomfortable. I greeted both parents with courtesy and introduced myself, “My name is Hom and I was a classmate of your daughter in Durbar High School at Grades 9 and 10.” I felt nervous. My heart was racing. I and my priest friend just wore a simple dress with slippers, and they likely thought we were labourers. According to Lahmi, initially, the girl did not want to see me and sent her married youngest sister, a mother of two children to offer a cup of tea. She was so beautiful, and my friend was happy to see her. He said, “she is perfect for you.” Unfortunately, I said him, “no, she is not, her face is different than the one I was there for.” My priest friend was surprised and waited for her. Finally, she came to meet us, and initially, she refused to recognize me. However, I humbly reminded her of our class and school and how I helped her at the final exam, and she offered tea and snacks that afternoon in the

school. Ultimately, she recognized me. She was surprised; and she did not believe me because I was a thin and lean boy and wore a tattered shirt and shoes with holes when I attended high school. I had changed over the eighteen years. I worked in the foreign aid-based rural development program in Nepal as a development aid worker. I then calmly and humbly proposed for marriage with her, her father and mother respectively. They were happy and surprised because they were already fatigued by looking for a groom for her for several years. When I proposed, they were surprised and were silent without a reaction. I humbly requested they think about it, take as much time as needed, inquire about me and check my reference, office, education, character or whatever they liked. They could judge whether I deserved her or not. And they did, they checked my background, character, job, house, and everything else.

I went to her house on the last weekend of September 1997 for the follow-up on marriage proposal and their family decision. At that time, all her family members were busy in preparation for some celebration or festival, which I had no idea about. I said, “What a surprise, it’s a big festival in this house?” she replied me hesitantly, “Yes, we are celebrating the first Bura Janko of my parents as they turn 77-years-7-months-7-days-7-hours-7-minutes and 7-seconds” next month. I congratulated her for the milestone auspicious day and offered my help with whatever she needed. It was very exciting for me to attend and observe the great ceremony and observe the Bura Janko of my future father and mother in-law on October 4, 1997, in Lalitpur, the historical medieval city of art.

### **Second Bura Janko: Saharsha Chandra Darshan (After Seeing 1,000 Full Moon Nights)**

We had another special day in 2000, December 10th, the special day for the second Bura Janko of my father and mother in-law after seeing 1,000 full moon days at the age of 80 years old and 10 months. This would be the ritual celebration of Saharsha Chandra Darshan or moon

worship and offer sawalakh Mata (to burn one hundred hundred-fifty thousand cotton made thread light) to God Moon in the full-moon night with sprinkle holy water from the conch shell. Fortunately, I attended and observed the ceremony and bowed down my head to their feet for the blessing in the full moon night after my immediate arrival from the United States attending the U.S. Center for Diseases Control and Prevention Research Training Program held in San Francisco. Their second Bura Janko was important to me and I returned with a great spirit and hope on the last day of conference without attending the field-based practical research training to conduct the first World Health Organization (WHO) Global Youth Tobacco Survey in Nepal with collaboration of WHO and the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention. I cleaned both their feet with holy water and milk and offered the coin and bowed down with my forehead. They were happy because of the presence of their son-in-law (me), their six-month old granddaughter and their daughter altogether. We exchanged blessing through bow-down. That was another milestone in our lives.

My father-in-law passed away at the aged of 84 in 2003 at the hospital after cardiac failure. Before his illness, his wife had a serious illness. My father-in-law prayed all the time for her recovery as she was everything to him. He devoted his time to the recovery of his beloved wife and transferred her illness to himself. He prayed to the lord to transfer her illness to him. His prayer was so powerful, even God accepted it. As a result, God accepted and gave life to my mother-in-law and took the life of father-in-law instead. He passed away a happy man without any fear or grief in a peaceful sleep. In honour of his eternal soul in heaven, my family and I did a ritual and spiritual ceremony to worship Lord Krishna and paraded in many temples and shrines of the Lalitpur city with family and friends. We walked a whole day in the outer and inner city of Lalitpur.

In 2007, February 28, my mother-in-law suddenly felt faint at 2 in the morning and was admitted to the nearest hospital, Patan Hospital. I got a call at 2 am in the morning and rushed to the hospital. Her condition was critical, and we requested the doctor to shift her to an intensive care unit, but she went in a coma. She had a problem of goitre and thyroid with a respiratory complication and was given oxygen through a pipe from the throat. The doctor advised the oxygen could not continue longer and if the oxygen was disconnected, she would die and if the doctor did not do the surgery to remove goitre, then she would die. It was a critical moment for her survival and there was no hope so far. Everyone prayed for her recovery. I chanted the *mantra Mritunjaya* (to revive from the possible death) of Lord Shiva (God of Destroyer). She was a courageous spiritual lady and remained in a coma for almost a month. She could not speak and when I called her “Maa” (mother), she opens both eyes and I said, “Do not worry we are always with you and God always with you.” Finally, the doctor’s team and our family decided to do surgery with risk of life and death on April 3, 2007. The team of doctors had little hope for her chance of success in surgery and that she might not have a chance to ever speak. It was a bitter truth to accept, there was no choice. Early in the morning, I prayed and chanted “Mritunjaya” before and after transferring her at Operation Theater, at 9 am and I was still chanting outside the door of Operation Theatre. After the long three-hour critical operation, the surgeon came from inside Operation Theatre and told us that surgery was successful and that she was out of danger while I was uninterruptedly chanting “*Mritunjya*” mantra. I could not stop crying and thanked the Gods and Goddess. She moved immediately to intensive care unit. The matron of the hospital, who was one of my lovely sisters congratulated me because she saw chanting of *mritunjya* mantra and my worship for her recovery.

I encouraged her to empower her willpower and self-energy and eternal-power and compassion as a living goddess in family and community. In my childhood, I learned a proverb that states “*Janko Yatala Dyo Julia*” or the ritual celebration of Bura Janko is to become a God. This is what I learned and observed while growing up in Nepal. Therefore, I always encouraged family members not to go and worship at outside temple or shrines. Families have their own god and goddess inside their homes and should pray and worship these gods. I strongly believed that if there was any Bura Janko celebrant in a home and family, the home became a sacred place like a sacred Mount Kailash of Manasarovar in Tibet and Muktinath (God of Salvation) in the Kali Gandaki Area of Western Nepal. They were fortunate to be able to worship their Bura Janko celebrant parents and/or grandparents as their living god and goddess in their home and community.

The priests of the temple always preferred that the people come to the temple. It was my understanding that if the people came to the temple, they would offer money, fruits and sweets and the priests would get an income. In addition, not everyone can visit the temple everyday to offer money, fruits and sweets to the priest. Thus, the Bura Janko celebrants are considered to worship or honor as “divine status” or “lineage or ancestral god or goddess” in the home and community. In the contemporary society, if there is no temple, you can go to the home of the Bura Janko celebrants and elderly people for chanting and praying altogether.

On May 30, 2007, after one month she was discharged from the hospital and she was able to speak and talk with the recovered voice. She got her second life. After the full recovery, my mother-in-law tells her daughter (my wife) what happened during one-month coma in the hospital. She described that she found herself in a heaven, a beautiful and calm city. She asked someone, where is it? One of the angels replied, “it is heaven” and she walked in a big garden



with flora and fauna and met her grandfather, grandmother, father, mother, sister, brothers and her family. She saw 108 beautiful drinking water taps in the garden like in a Muktinath's 108 taps. She liked to drink water and when she tried to drink it, the water stopped flowing, she tried second, third and fourth tap, but all of them stopped. As a result, she woke up crying. She described another event, while she was in heaven another day, she saw one man feeding grains to pigeons, another man came and said to him "your life is successful." She said, "I also feed grains to pigeon." The second man replied, "you feed only one day." She said, "no I feed them from many years." Again, the second man replied, "No, your 100 days is our one day in this place (heaven) your feeding is not enough and need more feeding for them" and suddenly she woke-up. She thought they were both Gods of heaven and aliens from different planets.

One day, my mother-in-law and her husband (father-in-law) walking in a beautiful place and garden while holding hands together, a *deva-duta* (angel) stopped her and said, "you are still not allowed to come with your husband, and I can only allow your husband to come with me. You still have time." She was astounded in her dream because my father-in-law already passed away in January 2003. If she was permitted to go with her husband and deva-duta, she died, otherwise she was still had a time to live on this beautiful planet.

She also said, while she was in the coma, she came home to search for her clothes, sari, opened and closed drawers and saw her jewelry, money and other kinds of stuff in the room locked with keys. While she was at home there was a terrible sound in her room and frightened her grandson and house cleaner, who was sleeping in her closed room. They were scared and could not sleep the whole night. It was disclosed by her grandson.

In June 2007, I invited my mother-in-law into my home to relax for almost one month. She spent most of the time with me discussing and sharing her experiences about

worshipping God and Goddess in her childhood and pilgrimage tours in Northern and Southern India. I always respected and motivated her to practice her life in a religious and spiritual way and she loved storytelling about spiritual scriptures. She narrated the story of Nachiketa and Yamaraj (God of Death) which she heard about from her beloved mother when she was a child. The story is illustrated in the Holy Hindu scripture *Kathopanishad* about the philosophy of super-consciousness of spiritual life.

My mother-in-law had such a higher-level spiritual awareness in family life after the first and second Bura Janko celebrations. She reiterated that the Bura Janko in her life was a result of good *karma* and blessing of ancestors and needed to see life again and focused her mind to a spiritual journey to spend actively for the rest of her life; that's why she felt Bura Janko was a celebration of cosmic or refreshed life since there was no issue of life and death as the core message of the holy story of Nachiketa and Yama of Kathopanishad scripture. (see Appendix – A).

**Diagnosed Vascular Dementia of Mother-in-law:** In January 2012, my mother-in-law was hospitalized at Bir Hospital (an oldest hospital in Nepal established in Rana regime) due to fainting in the home. She was under the care of a neurologist who diagnosed her with symptoms of vascular dementia. At that time, a retired geriatric physician from England, a friend of mine was in Nepal and consulted about the condition. He diagnosed her with vascular dementia which had no available treatment in Nepal. She forgot her current life activity and revival of her teen and childhood memory, she could not even recognize her son, daughter-in-law, grandchildren and other close family members. She felt confusion, agitation, and became violent sometimes. Her memory losses were displaying awkward behaviour and attitude. Sometimes she was cool and sometimes she cried like a baby. She expressed 'resistive' behaviour and attitude.

My daughter (her youngest grand daughter) was her favourite kid. She taught her “*Charya Nritya*” (sacred dance of Vajrayana Buddhist tradition) at the age of three. My daughter loved to dance and participated in dance competitions from the class of Pre-kindergarten in school and practiced dance in her free time as the passion of her life. My mother-in-law danced in ritual worship celebration and celebration in her childhood. After vascular dementia, I encouraged my daughter to visit grandma home to show her dance to grandma to have fun, laugh, and happiness. My mother-in-law expressed her happiness with her facial expression and followed the step of the dance of my daughter and recalled memories in childhood life. When mother-in-law suffered from vascular dementia, my daughter showed her dance and led the way to her grandmother to reminiscence her past life through sacred dance. My daughter also performed the same dance in Baycrest Hospital while volunteering in the summer of August 2015 and Pine Villa Retirement Residence in November 2015 as I presented Bura Janko special event because rites and dancing, singing and music filled life with joy from cradle to grave.

**Third Bura Janko at Hospital Bed:** On July 2014, when my mother-in-law turned 88-years-8-months-8-days-8-hours-8-minutes, she was in a hospital bed due to surgery on her knee. The family priest was invited to do a simple ritual procession of the Deva-Ratha-Rohan ritual ceremony and offer golden ear-rings and read the sacred *mantra* with the family members. After she was discharged from the hospital, on September 2014, my wife and my daughter offered colourful sari, clothes, gifts, and worshipped her as a divine mother goddess in the home and she was worshiped as ‘living goddess’ forever.

**Death of Mother-in-law:** My beloved mother-in-law had a strong will power, big heart and energetic soul. She survived during the catastrophic earthquake as she was living in the youngest daughter’s house on April 24, 2015. I strongly believed that because of her first and

second Bura Janko, God saved her for us. After three months, my wife and daughter landed in Canada. She was alone, but my daughter talked with her on Skype and brought her joy, fun and happiness. She showed the snow and snowman and snow woman as her grandma. My mother-in-law laughed all the time and when she saw a small wheelchair car, she really liked to use that and run on the street or city road. She felt sad, she was alone at home most of the time and she got very little care from her daughter-in-law and son. My mother-in-law was struggling all the time with illness, pain, loneliness and social isolation due to lack of companionship of her daughters and grandchildren. On June 21, 2016 morning at 6 am, she passed away by sudden hemorrhagic strokes as a result of the accumulation of abnormal protein ( $\beta$ -amyloid in blood vessels. While my mother-in-law was in her deathbed, both daughters and grand kids were there except my family. I believed that if she could get proper care and companionship from my wife and daughter, my mother-in-law could have survived 100 years. However, she passed away at the age of 92. I expected her fourth Bura Janko celebration and planned to attend and make a documentary film after completion of my Ph.D. I lost my dream which can never be fulfilled in my life; it was an irreparable loss for both personal and academic life. While she was active, she was fasting (*vrata*) every Sunday to worship and offer holy water to God Sun to relief from headache and pray for longevity of her husband and blissful wish of death prior to her husband. She believed that worship of the sun has an explicit connection between divinized celestial body and human bodies and that is why she preferred or recommended her daughters such fasting for their wellness and longevity.

After 45 days since her death, while performing a ritual death ceremony *sraddha*, a child was born in the United States who was a great-grand-daughter whose, face was a splitting image of her. Everyone believed that she was reincarnated or reborn. Both daughters in Nepal of my

late mother-in-law realized that the child was their mother (my mother-in-law), because of the way she talked, her facial expression, and behaved and while they came home, she was laughing like their mother (my mother-in-law). It was a miracle and she was born as her great-granddaughter to feel her presence in the family. It is a strong belief that how Bura Janko is dignified features of their lives and they have a divine status and metaphysical life.

## **First Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) in the United States**

### **Personal Narratives and Reflections**

I have been inspired to be an independent researcher and lifelong student of Bura Janko, and often searching and accessing the news and events both in Nepal and in any part of the global Newar communities. This experience has led to this thesis. During this research about Bura Janko in the global Newar community, I found a blog about the Bura Janko of American couple Malthus Thomas and Betty Durham of the first Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) to turn 77-years-7-months-7-days-7-hours-7-minutes in Portland, Oregon by Vajrayana Buddhist Priest. The ritual procession of Bura Janko was Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. This was a significant find towards preserving the Bura Janko tradition abroad by an immigrant Newar community disseminated by regular blogger Dr. Robin Man Shakya (2018).

I immediately contacted my brother priest through an email and phone. He happily replied over the phone. He was the founder and priest of the first Nepalese Buddhist Vajrayana Temple “Nritya Mandala Mahavihar.” In 2009, he founded the Temple and developed the *Charya Nritya* (sacred dance) teaching center, sacred arts, meditation and teachings. Here, he carried out several ritual and cultural ceremonies, including “Bura Janko,” wedding ceremonies, puberty ceremonies, birthdays, child-birth ceremony and more to serve over 200 immigrant Newar families from Nepal. The center serves as a major step in the preservation, expansion and exploration of all Newar meditative arts, and culture. He was cooperative to aid in the writing of this thesis on “Bura Janko.” He graciously invited me to attend one of his celebrant’s first Bura Janko. On October 20, 2018 at 7.30 pm at the Portland International Airport, the priest and his two colleagues welcomed and received the author taking him to the temple. The Buddha temple, meditation, holy water spring tap, library hall was so beautiful with rounded mandala

size. Early in the morning, all proceeded to the celebrant's home in his car. Everyone was dressed-up with the traditional Newari dress, *Daura sural* and coat (Newari traditional dress).

As a student, I bowed down to celebrant lady who looked like a dignified celebrity and congratulated her, her daughters and son-in-law. She was a widow since 1981 after the passing away of her beloved husband. She was a mother of two daughters and son-in-law with four grandchildren and two great-grandchildren living with daughters in Portland. She completed the symbolic age of 77-years-7-months-7-days-7-hours-7-minutes-7-seconds on October 21, 2018, and therefore the Bhima-Ratha-Rohan ritual ceremony was to take place at the astrological time at 10 a.m. according to the Lunar calendar of Nepal. The grand children and the great-grandchildren and their friends showed enthusiasm with fashionable dress and savvy movements. They all were astonished to see the worship of the goddess of longevity, and *Homa* (sacred fire), along with the holy bath or sprinkle water from amid family members and the community neighbourhood. She looked proud to ride the divine vehicle of palanquin in the form of Lord Sun with a flying horse as a unique fortune or blessing. She had become a divine mother in her community. Her dress was elegant with traditional colourful bright sari and blouse with jewellery in the ears like a new bride with a brighten and cheerful or smiley face. The celebrant was now ascending through the divine vehicle amid scenes of a young old lady with red sari with several ornaments. Receiving a blessing from her is supposed to come true, and she became meaningful in any circumstances of everyone's life. Everyone had received her blessing. In the last moment, I also tribute my humble respect bowing down to her feet and offering gifts of some money and *khada* (holy scarf). A brother priest allowed her blessing by permitting me to touch her feet with my forehead as I would show honor or worship as to Goddess. When the priest expressed my blissful wish, she showed reluctance, but she allowed it. The procession room was

in the garage cleansed with holy water and decorated by a big round mandala with the *Homa* (sacred fire), *Kalash*, palanquin with decoration of Vajrayana's god and goddess. The *shubha sait pau* (best auspicious time) is written in the special card by astrologer through calculation of birth, time and year with horoscope and birth star (constellation) and horoscope figure out by astrologer function. The celebrant sat with both her daughters and son-in-law to perform worship together. The sacred home, mandala, palanquin was already ready in the eve of Bura Janko ceremony.

The celebrant invited *las-kush* (welcoming) through holy spring water before sitting in the seat for the symbolic purification of her body, mind, and speech. The other objects include *jola nhaykan* and *shinamoo* are the mirror reflection to show the god, goddess and deities. The other worship items are *kisli* (a small plate of soil with rice, coins, and betel nuts), and *Tikka* (red powder with yogurt and rice) for the celebrant. The priest performs a *Homa* (sacred fire) to offer ghee and almost 33 types of grains for the worship of planetary deities. After the completion of the *homa* worship or *puja*, and seating of the celebrant at the palanquin (chariot) the first to worship are daughters, son-in-law, grandsons, grand-daughters and other relatives after they poured water from a conch shell onto her feet and touched her feet with their foreheads. The priest gave garlands of flowers and *Yo-Mari* (favourite bread or sweet) to wear on her body. The ceremony of *khen* (egg) *sangan* (offer holy dish as best of luck) includes wine, fish and egg offered by the family members to the celebrant with blissful consciousness.

I observed closely how the priest performed worship to the statue of goddess *Usnisavijaya* (the divine mother goddess of longevity and long-life) in order to purify *karma* and bestow the blessing of good health and long-life span. Similarly, the priest performed *pooja* (worship) to Lord Ganesh, Lord Shiva, nine planetary gods and goddesses. The *mandala* was



made so attractive by sun and moon depictions and several small soil pots with decorations of various symbols of god and goddess. The sacred fire ceremony was held. The priest worshiped all gods and goddesses by offering worship materials, flowers, holy waters, sweets and fruits, through chanting and mantras. There were many worship processions for the Sun God mainly through the offering of flowers, red-powders, fruits, sweets with holy waters with chanting mantras and hymns readings by sacred scriptures. Bura Janko shows the sensitivity to the spiritual view of life. In Buddhism, it is the highest state in which the Bura Janko celebrants can attain enlightenment, which is an initiation of “*Nirvana*” a state of being of perfect peace, love and happiness (a heavenly state).

**Betari Chikyu Ceremony (Offering Turbine of white cloth):** The relatives of the celebrant offered and covered the son-in-law’s head in a turbine (long white cloth) to honour and respect him as the one who leads the ritual ceremony.

After 20 years, I had the opportunity to observe first Bura Janko in Portland, the United States in the digital age. The celebrant had a piece of heavy jewelry and fashionable dress traditional dupatta sari which were symbolic customs of the Bura Janko. What was remarkably different is that the entire celebration and procession were recorded and sent to their native country Nepal and their relatives as a ceremony of family connectedness through social media. It was a big change to have the technology to spread this culture between continents. Twenty years ago, there was no internet, thus no exchange or sharing of any event or ceremony concerning Bura Janko. Now everyone can share or disseminate the live event within a second or minute through social media like Facebook and Skype. The entire event was covered live, thus shared with the home country Nepal and family relatives around the world through an internet.

The religious ceremony of the first Janko at Portland's Nritya Mandala Mahavihara led by Vajrayana priest was a testimony to the fact that the Nepalese Portlanders are keen to preserve and practice the traditional and ritual values of the Newar culture. The celebrant was treated like a holy bride and carried on a colourfully decorated palanquin on the shoulder of eight or ten young boys including her grandsons who paraded around the streets of residents for almost an hour with enthusiasm and courage. The Janko parade led by a priest with the traditional music *Dhime Baja* played by males and females together, a camera person, honoree's, celebrant's family members, neighbours and local people. Solidarity and participation were praiseworthy. Dhime Baja (a typical Newar drum used both sides by stick or hand) and dhime dance were the main attraction of the celebration. It is believed that Bhima-Ratha-Rohan celebration secures destination for the celebrant(s) to mount chariot of the Sun God which is carried by flying horses to bring them to paradise or *nirvana* after the end of life. The main attraction of the ceremony was the illuminating of the traditional "*Twadewa*" (brass oil lamp) in the ceremony place. On the evening of that day, the "*charya nritya*" (1,000 years old sacred dance) was practiced in the presence of Lord Buddha in the Meditation Hall with beloved priest and his foreign students.

**Blessing of Two Celebrants of Bura Janko in the United States:** I had the opportunity to pay my respects and pray for the first Bura Janko celebrant and honoree, who had completed her first and second Bura Janko on Friday, August 26, 2018, at Nritya Mandala Mahavihara. I prayed for her longevity, emotional, spiritual and intellectual wellness and bowed down to touch her feet with my forehead. She was happy and gave blessings. She shared happiness about her Bura Janko feeling it a gift of her re-birth and ascending the chariot on the auspicious of Bhimaratharohan - riding the great chariot of Lord Sun was her success in life by this traditional ritual and expressed her gratefulness for Lord and ancestor. Also, I met another 86-years old

Bura Janko celebrant. She had already accomplished first and second Bura Janko in Nepal prior to her reunion with her family in the United States. She is active and always a cheerful soul and awaiting third Bura Janko at the age of 88 years, eight months and eight days.

Every soul is potentially divine.  
*Swami Vivekananda, 1893*

## Chapter 5: Discussion

Growing old is an eternal truth that cannot be ignored in its universal magnitude in both humanity and culture. Bura Janko is a form of ageing wellness in the globe through an ethnographic exploration celebration or ceremonials constructed for the everyday life of the elderly not only in the global Newar community but also in global cultural diversity. Bura Janko symbolizes a golden age pride and new genre of culture to nourish and nurture human blossom in creating holistic wellness and welfare for the elderly world. It elevates unity, purity and divinity as divine bliss for the celebrant, families and community. In Newar community, every older adult blissfully wishes to celebrate their first Bura Janko “Bhima-Ratha-Rohan” in their life before death to free them from the fear of death.

**Bura Janko of Malthus and Betty at Portland, Oregon:** During a visit to Portland, United States, I had the opportunity to talk to Betty Durham through a brother priest as a courtesy call and expressed respect, generosity, compassion and congratulations as they followed and practiced our Bura Janko tradition and how meaningful it is in their life after enlightenment of practices of Vajrayana Buddhism. Malthus wrote an email about their spectacular experience on Bura Janko and how significant it will be in their retired life in Mexico. (Personal communication with Malthus, January 2019). (See Appendix - B).

**Bura Janko Offers Honor, Wellness and Active Wisdom to Carlton S. Coon:** I never imagined that I needed to send a condolence message on the sad demise of Carl Coon who passed away on December 3, 2018, and I found this sad news when searching him on Google to know about Carl on December 15, 2018, at 3.50 am and cried to myself “Oh! My God.” My

wife woke-up and came to me as I was still working in the study room. I was shocked and saddened as I had planned to visit him with a gift of this thesis next year in May 2019 in his hometown Washington, D.C., the United States which I also dedicate to him. I could not sleep for two nights. Dr. Carl was a true humanist and divine soul who had the fortune to complete his first, second and third Bura Janko celebration from his beloved daughter, son and grandchildren. I immediately sent heart-felt condolences to his daughter Dr. Ellen Coon. She replied to me by email on December 16, 2018 which was sent on December 15, 2018:

“Thank you for your lovely note of condolence and your support for my father over the years. I truly do believe that the Bura Janko ceremonies made his life longer and more enjoyable. I am so glad you were interested in. Please keep me informed of your work. With best wishes, Ellen Coon”

I never imagined and believed that he was active being 91 years old while writing and inspiring responses from humanists around the world on his website [www.progressivehumanism.com](http://www.progressivehumanism.com).” His last post was on November 4, 2018 entitled “Northeast Syria in the spotlight” where he was in Damascus from 1952-1956). It was the last time, he posted before he left this tiny world on December 3, 2018, with joy and bid farewell. His website “Progressive Humanism” is truly dedicated to the new approach to the humanist philosophy. He started to write on the “Progressive Humanism” from July 1967 to November 2018 (over five-decades). At his end of life, he published an autobiography “*People of Earth: The First Forty*” in October 2018 which covers the first half of his life. He gifted this world with his autobiography as a truly monumental and inspirational for the elder world.

In 1985, after retiring from diplomatic career (the U.S. Ambassador to Nepal), he cultivated a long-time interest in human evolution and the human condition, writing several books, including *Culture Wars and the Global Village: A Diplomat’s Perspective* (2000), and *One Planet, One People, beyond “Us versus them”* (2004) that deals with global challenges. In

2004, he was elected to the board of directors of the American Humanist Association (AHA) and shortly after appointed as Vice-President. He was honoured with the AHA's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2013 and says "*Our country is in trouble. It's like a snake that has outgrown its skin and is trying to shed it. We've gotten too big and complicated and diverse to be labeled a Christian nation. Humanism fits the emerging need. Let's make it happen*" while accepting the award (Bardi, 2018). He truly had a divine soul and had personal qualities that enriched humanity.

Dr. Ellen Coon and her brother came together in a traditional third glorious Newar Bura Janko ritual of her beloved father Carl Coon held in 2015 in their hometown, Washington, D.C. in the United States. Dr. Ellen Coon sent me an e-mail on how Bura Janko enhanced wellness and active wisdom for her heart-patient father at the age of 90 (Coon, 2017). Dr. Ellen Coon is the eyewitness, source of evidence on the positive effects of Bura Janko: improved self-esteem, no memory loss or cognitive decline, no loneliness or social isolation in addition to the positive effects of longevity for both of her parents (Coon, 2017). (See Appendix – C).

**Rarest Fifth Bura Janko in Nepal:** As stated earlier, at the beginning of the New Year 2019, a rare fifth Bura Janko of Mayaju Maharjan was held on January 20, 2019, on the auspicious occasion on the age of 108 years, eight months, eight days and eighth hour. According to an online article in the Kathmandu Post by reporter, Timilsina (2019), Mayaju Maharjan wore traditional Newari bridal attire and, her hair was adorned with a single peacock feather. The article further describes Mayaju Maharjan as pampered with the traditional manicure and pedicure—her hands and feet painted with *ala*, a bright red color during the procession. She sat peacefully in a chariot with a charming smile, pulled by her grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren. Present family consists of more than 145

members and no one can remember taking her to the hospital even once until last year (Timilsina, 2019). She still remembers her teen days fetching drinking water in Sundhara in Kathmandu with her friends to drink *lu yu la*: (gold water) and the great earthquake in 1934 that destroyed her home (Timilsina, 2019).

Upon completion of this celebration, I imagined the transformation of Mayaju Maharjan from being close to divine status into the full form of the Buddhist Divine Mother Goddess of the earth. The Newars and I included know in our hearts and consciousness that Mayaju Maharjan will be welcomed by Lords of heaven on her arrival to the heavens with garlands and a musical dance consortium after she leaves her body and exhale her last breath from this world. It concludes that a meaningful inner-beautiful life when she leaves this world is filled with the happiness and joy full of life.

I clearly noticed after the birth of my daughter that this new baby was crying. Despite the tears, we were very happy; I often tried to figure out why she was crying. Perhaps, she was leaving the divine world (mother's womb) and taking her first breath in our world. I thought she was playing, praying and enjoying with accompanying of Divine Lords in her mother's womb between her seventh and ninth months of pregnancy. Possibly, she was crying as she was leaving her divine world; who knows whether she will immediately welcome another divine world after leaving this one.

One can be sure, however, that Mayaju Maharjan will be welcomed as an exceptional Goddess of Earth in heaven after her completion of a divine fifth Bura Janko celebration. In my view, such a sacrament is comparable to the life in heaven of Buddha and Christ.

I imagined that, like when my daughter was born, Mayaju was born crying too, however, she will leave this life with joy and enlightenment. It is a consequence of the consecrated and

celebrated first, second, third, fourth and fifth Bura Janko as divine worship by family and community with love, compassion and benevolence.

Personally, the meaning of the celebration of the Fifth Bura Janko of Mayaju Maharjan was a miracle and in searching for the living divine soul of Mayaju Maharjan. I enlightened the true value between *Para Vidya* (metaphysical knowledge) and *Apara Vidya* (physical knowledge) which is beautifully exhibited in the Vedic scripture “Mundakopnishad.” Mundakopnishad is one of the most important 108 Upanishad (Hindu sacred scriptures) in Vedic Era. The essence of hymns of Mudakopnishad is given in Appendix – D, which is extracted from the Divine Life Society (Shivananda, 2019). It illustrates my imaginative life of Mayaju Maharjan, a symbol of the metaphysical with spiritual a journey of life in the greater horizon of the fifth Bura Janko.

I believe that there was an impact of metaphysical consciousness in the life of Mayaju Maharjan and strongly felt that Brahma-Jnanis (metaphysical knowledge keeper) and qualified aspirants like Mayaju Maharjan are very rare in this world. I am convinced that many elderly people (65 or 75 or 85 or 95 or 105 or over) pass through these important milestones alone and without family or community. To them, it is not a spiritual or cultural event. Many get a ‘gold watch’ treatment at 65 but are never honoured when they cross another cultural or spiritual line. Elderly people who participate in a ritual such as Bura Janko do not cross the years of old age without their community. Bura Janko guides them spiritually and culturally to blissful divinity surrounded by their family and community; they will be respected and visited by many for the rest of their lives.

These are my reflections of Mayaju Maharjan’s divine life. I also desire a celebration of Bura Janko in the twilight of my life; to experience such a rite would be a gift of god. I also



blissfully pray for a peaceful and compassion world for every elderly people; and am ready to offer or donate everything in my life including organs and body after my death.

The miracle and rarest Fifth Bura Janko ritual ceremony of the oldest senior lady Mayaju Maharjan at the age of 108-years-8-months-8-days-8-hours held on January 20, 2019, in a Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. As there is no historical record available, that means there is no record that this happened in the past and may never happen in the future. Secondly, the Government of Nepal honoured cultural giant veteran both Newar and Nepali culture pioneer expert Dr. Satya Mohan Joshi as “*Bangmaya Satabdi Purush*” (*Legendary Centenary Personality*) at the age of 98 years old prior to reaching 100 years old to commemorate the national celebration of the age of 100 birth anniversary to be held on May 11, 2019. In 2017, the Lalitpur Sub-Metropolitan City Nepal declared a celebration the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of Dr. Joshi in May 2019 as a national senior birthday festival. It was a milestone initiative of the local government to honour senior scholar as a national symbol of pride. However, I am shocked and sad to learn that Dr. Joshi has dropped his Fourth Bura Janko with his wife on the completion of 99-years-9-months-9-days this year (Personal communication, 2019).

The fifth Bura Janko of Mayaju Maharjan commemorated in January 2019 and 100<sup>th</sup> years birth anniversary of Dr. Joshi will be held on May 11, 2019, reflect the historical series beyond the passage of rites to elevate or transform from human to divine status through transcendent of wisdom and “*Nirvana*” (salvation) in Newar culture (ancient medieval the culture of the world) and how to enhance self-esteem, reduce cognitive decline and enjoying less memory loss or dementia in this advanced world. I plan to visit Nepal from May 6 to 12 to use skills from the Applied Media Aesthetic course to capture and demonstrate the scenes of medieval Newar ageing culture at the aged of 108 and 100 birthday ceremonies in Nepal in May

2019. It is a great opportunity to capture and demonstrate the scenes or event of special national 100<sup>th</sup> birthday the ceremony of Dr. Joshi (conferred honorary doctorate from Kathmandu University), and an observer, and eyewitness to write a feature article about Dr. Joshi in the gerontological, anthropological and art-based research perspectives as my tribute.

I would have valuable opportunity to be an observer and eyewitness to connect with senior lady Mayaju Maharjan (aged of 108 years old) and her family caregivers about holistic wellness, and, capture scenes of her daily life and family caregiving cultural practices during my Nepal visit from May 6-12, 2019. Her family celebrated 5<sup>th</sup> Bura Janko—old age ritual (*Maha-Divya-Ratha-Rohan or Sky-Flying Horse Chariot Ceremony*) on the turn of 108-years-8-months-8-days-8-hours which was held on January 20, 2019, in a Vajrayana Buddhist tradition. It was never happened in the past and may never happened in the future. I intent to demonstrate it and write a feature article in the gerontological, anthropological and art-based research perspectives in order to globalize such Newar ageing culture as no one has yet done such a study to create an academic interest in the care of elderly people. It is intended to prove that Bura Janko a *sukhavati* (happiness) paradise—a pure *karma* or life where all will attain enlightenment and it was a miracle to have such a sacred life for 108 years old Mayaju Maharjan in Nepal. Also, I received a CTV Community Media Prize and Best Film Award on “Dancing for a Cure” on April 16, 2019. This film is true life story of my mother-in-law who diagnosed vascular dementia. She passed away in 2016.

### **Bura Janko from a Gerontology Lens**

The numerous studies in gerontology indicate that loneliness and social isolation are the silent killer among the older adult aged of 65 years or over around the world. Globally, older adults face loneliness and social isolation as an epidemic public health threat. In 2012,

the Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) published a research paper which disclosed that 43 percent of older adults suffer from loneliness in the United States. The study also concluded that functional cognitive decline and death occurred due to loneliness among older adults more than 60 years old (Perissintto, Cenzer & Covinsky, 2012). In *Aging is a Social Process* (Wister, 2018) states “it is estimated that approximately 16 percent of older Canadians experience social isolation.” Wister also indicates that social isolation and loneliness are not the same thing (ibid.). The 2018 international survey of the Henry Kaiser Family Foundation states, “More than two in ten report loneliness or social isolation in the U.K. and the U.S., double the share in Japan. More than a fifth of adults in the United States (22 percent) and the United Kingdom (23 percent) as well as one in ten adults (nine percent) in Japan” (DiJulio, Hamel, Muñana & Brodie, 2018) is quite alarming to the public policy advocacy in Canada.

There is a genuine concern that countless number of elderly people suffer alone; the purpose of this autoethnographic study is to encourage solutions. While this study of a medieval Hindu and Buddhist rituals that elevates the spiritual, mental and social health and standing of the elderly, all communities must find their own way to honour the elderly. Whether someone is Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Native Canadian or has any other belief, one hopes they can use their own traditions to revive respect for the elderly. If they have lost this, I hope this study of the Bura Janko can help find it again in their communities.

In this study, Bura Janko or similar rituals are recommended as a psycho-socio-spiritual event that can combat loneliness and social isolation. My observations of celebration of the Bura Janko demonstrates a strong correlation between psychological-social-spiritual wellbeing and community involvement, community networks, social inclusion, and even Age Friendly communities. The public policy dialogue and academic debate about the potential of Bura Janko

is crucial for an Age-friendly community. It is also recommended that a senior-friendly recreational care therapy or activity in long-term care facilities and community-based adult day care centers in the Greater Sudbury areas be the initial setting for celebrations such as Bura Janko. The Bura Janko enhances living a good life with emotional well-being through prolonged cooperation among family, friends, and community. It fosters a deep sense of respect for older adults' life experiences and wisdom and improve an older adult's quality of life.

### **Future Research**

It is a time for the policy dialogue and policy-relevant research advocacy among multi-stakeholders and multi-cultural communities in the Greater Sudbury Area. As this autoethnography demonstrates, these constructive ceremonies create increase in happiness and self-esteem for seniors. It is also suggested that Bura Janko can lead to better health including less memory loss and a reduced potential for dementia. the Bura Janko can be adapted to address the Sudbury community's psycho-social, cultural, spiritual, intellectual and emotional wellness. The action-oriented research is an instrumental to address the following issues:

- Explore the modified “Bura Janko” practice in terms of their multi-cultural values and philosophy as part of recreation and leisure activities for the residents in Sudbury LTC settings and for senior community centers in the Greater Sudbury Area including First Nations communities.
- Explore Canadian adaptations for Bura Janko-type ceremonies that encourage emotional pride and wellness for seniors.
- The modified Bura Janko ceremonies will have a great deal to offer North America, who have no life-cycle rituals to celebrate the milestone of reaching old age which can change the perception of old age to golden age.

- Canadian adaptation of Bura Janko activity can be an innovative approach to emotional wellness for the residents in Ontario as a policy debate or device to incorporate it long-term care recreational and restorative therapeutic program.
- The American adaptation Bura Janko can easily replicated in Canada and other parts of world to create emotional wellness to reduce potential dementia among older adult and reduce the huge cost of their care.

### **What Next**

Based on my experiences in Toronto-based long-term care facilities from 2014 to 2016 as a volunteer and field placement intern in Baycrest Hospital, Bendale Acres, Pine Villa and Leisure World, the following critical suggestions are proposed for the public policy dialogue among stakeholders and advocates.

- How can Bura Janko-style events be integrated into existing routines in Canadian LTC facilities as an integral aspect of recreational, therapeutic and restorative activities through collaborative efforts of family members and communities?
- How can annual or monthly celebrations for seniors with participation of their families and communities are adapted and celebrated to realistic Canadian situations?
- How do we propose this as policy reform for the existing LTC programs?
- How can we initiate policy debate on modified Canadian-style Bura Janko as an innovative recreational and restorative therapy for honoring residents to reduce potential dementia or declining cognitive impairment?
- How to explore more cross-cultural research on culture of aging about how diversified families and communities (both indigenous and non-indigenous) physical, emotional, spiritual, and social wellbeing and wellness for elderly people.

- Following-up a CTV Community Media Prize Winner, I will create a 30-minutes art-based research documentary film about 109 year old Mayaju Maharjan who celebrated 5<sup>th</sup> Bura Janko “Maha-Divya-Ratha-Rohan (Voyage to the *Sky-Flying Horse Chariot towards Heaven*). It is a rare opportunity to catch this on film including her daily life routine and challenges, non-verbal, and facial expressions in her inner and spiritual life; and caregivers’ care, love, and compassion. The film will record a contemporary Bura Janko through gerontological and anthropological lenses.
- I also propose to honour 98-year old Hazel McCallion. She is Chief Elder Officer of Rivera Inc., with a Canadian style Bura Janko when she will be 99 years, nine-months and nine-days old.
- I propose to organize a Senior Fashion Day with the showcase of multicultural and aboriginal dances, music, foods and funs in the local community.

“Elderly people in the West would benefit a great deal from closer community support and a celebration of old age rather than the isolation they now suffer.

I should say that every time I have conducted a Bura Janko in this country, all the guests have had tears in their eyes and told me it was one of the most meaningful occasions of their lives.”

- Ellen Coon, 2017

## **Conclusion**

Bura Janko is a 5,000 years old tradition and both Hindu and Buddhist ritual practice of spiritually and culturally based worship in Newar culture in terms of cultural commitment to care and the initial transition to divine status. I belong to the Newar culture and practices Newar tradition of spirituality, religiosity and a value practice that contributes to disseminating cross-culture meaning and consciousness. On the other hand, the Newar native community believes that Bura Janko sustains the family institution and kinship; and strengthens intergenerational connectedness and social threads. It can further enhance older adults' holistic wellness (physical, mental, social, spiritual and emotional). I am enthusiastic to learn fourth and fifth Bura Janko in the spirit of mind gravitation and passion of life as knowledge keeper, navigator, collaborator, researcher, educator, advocate and volunteer.

These initiatives will create an interest and insightful understanding for the scholars of the interdisciplinary fields such as: aging health, gerontology, anthropology, history, social science, cognitive science, human science, physical and metaphysical science, indigenous culture, communication and philosophy about medieval ageing culture. These come in terms of a series of beyond the passage rites which elevate or transform elderly people to near divine status through transcendent of wisdom and “*Nirvana*” in medieval Newar culture. They also enhance self-esteem, reduce cognitive decline resulting in less memory loss or dementia in this advanced world. It will be used for the cross-cultural sharing and enhance consciousness among

the scholars. Researchers include humanists, historians, cognitive scientists, anthropologists, and social scientists; it will result in the publishing of feature articles and peer reviewed academic papers. The result will be disseminated for further autoethnographic research on global ageing culture and communication which will be a greater effort to reduce dementia in the ageing process.

In conclusion, the Bura Janko ceremonies contribute to promoting sustain physical, mental, spiritual and emotional aspects of wellbeing and wellness that replicates in anywhere community and society in any part of the world. Thus, Bura Janko ceremonies create a social network, harmonious intergenerational relation, and sharing and caring worship environment as a higher level of consciousness of religion, philosophy, science, and spirituality altogether in the Newar culture. It enhances ageing wellness among older adults to reduce their loneliness and social isolation in family and communities as well.



## Appendix A Storytelling on Holy Conversation Between God of Death and Nachiketa

My mother-in-law explained me story about the holy conversation between Nachiketa a young boy and Yama (the God of Death) which is illustrated in the Hinduism scripture Kathopanishada.

In ancient place of Indian sub-continent, there was a name of Vajasrawas, a donor performing a *Biswajit Yajna*. In this Yajna, the performer had to donate or give away all his wealth. The place was beautifully decorated. Many rishis (sages or saints) attended and they were chanting the *mantras* while offering to the holy fire. Cows were valued as special assets in those ancient days, and thus Vajashrava decided to donate all his cows to Brahmins.

Nachiketa son of Vajashrava observing such sacrificial ritual with innocent and surprised. He noticed that his father was giving away only old and thin cows who had given their milk for a long time and who were not capable of bearing calves. Nachiketa, in order to discourage his father from giving old cows, asked, "O father, who have you decided to give me away?"

The purpose was to stop his father to do such things. At first, his father did not take any notice of his 'childish' question, but Nachiketa was persistent. He repeated such a question three times. When the irritated father said, "Nachiketa, I give you to the God of Death." Vajasrawas did not mean what he said. He had said these words in anger. No father would like to send their son away to the God of Death. But, Nachiketa decided to obey the words of his father by going to the abode of Yama. Vajasrawas asked his son to stay back.

Nachiketa told his father that their ancestors never went back on their words and he would like to follow the same. Nachiketa knew that all the things in this world are temporary and he was not afraid of death. He understood that following the path of truth is the gateway to heaven. Vajasrawas was very sad but gave him permission as a follower of truth. Nachiketa left for the abode of Yama.

On reaching there, he found that Yama was not at home. For three days and three night, the Nachiketa waited without food, water and sleep at the doorstep of Yama's abode. Yama on his return was deeply sorrowed to see that there was no welcome to Nachiketa. Yama himself greeted him with due respect. For having kept Nachiketa waiting for three days, Yama granted him three boons. The first boon, Nachiketa said, "I seek the welfare of my father as my first boon." Yama granted him happily.

The second boon "Sir I desire to know how one could reach heaven where there is no sorrow, old age or death." Nachiketa did not ask this second boon for himself but for the sake of the people. He wanted everyone to learn this sacred knowledge and free themselves from the sufferings. Yama was pleased with the unselfishness of Nachiketa and gave the details of sacrifice and performance that would take one to heaven. Nachiketa was an intelligent boy with spiritual knowledge.

For the third boon, Nachiketa asked to learn the mystery of what comes after death. Yama was reluctant on this question. He said that this had been a mystery even to the gods. He

asked Nachiketa to ask for some other boon and offered many materials gains happiness and wealth. But Nachiketa argues that all worldly treasures and heavenly pleasures come to an end sooner or later. If not day after, after a hundred years. These are not permanent means of enjoyment. He claims to get the ultimate knowledge of Self, "O Lord of Death, you have promised me the third boon." Yama was pleased with such a young truth-seeker who had rejected the path of enjoyment and chose the path of goodness. Then, Yama taught him the knowledge of the Atman, realizing which man attains immortality. Know the self as Lord of the Chariot. The body as the Chariot itself, the discriminating intellect as charioteer, and the mind as reins.

The senses say the wise, are the horses; selfish desires are the roads they travel. When the self is confused with the body, mind, and senses, they point out, he seems to enjoy pleasure and suffer sorrow. The all-knowing self was never born, nor will it die. Beyond cause and effect, this self is eternal. When the body dies, the self does not die. One must discriminate the soul from the body, which is the seat of desire. After death, it is the soul that remains; and the soul is immortal. Thus, having learned the wisdom of the Brahman from Yama, Nachiketa was freed from the cycle of births" (Kathopanishad).

## **Appendix B Marcus Thomas – First Bura Janko Celebrant in Portland, Oregon**

Mr. Marc Thomas was the second American citizen couple celebrant with wife Betty Durham with attainment of the First Bura Janko (Bhima-Ratha-Rohan) Celebration in June 25, 2018 in Portland, Oregon, United States by Vajrayana Buddhist Newar tradition.

Dear Hom Shrestha

“Thank you for your interest in my Janko experience. I will do my best to outline my thoughts in this e mail.

I will be brief, but I hope to cover all the major thoughts and experiences I had during the Janko ceremony. I come from a western background and only began to study Buddhism twenty or twenty-five years ago. I have studied Buddhism mainly from the Tibetan Mahayana tradition. I practiced Buddhist based mediation for the last twenty years or so.

I looked forward to this ceremony as kind of a culmination of my human life. I have described the ceremony as sort of a "funeral". I mean this in a positive sense. In the sense that Janko gives me retrospective on my human life. Most westerners have a negative attitude toward death. I see death as just the endpoint on a journey.

Of course, I continue to live past the Janko ceremony but Janko was a vehicle for freeing me or at least a limiting of my attachment to earthly desires.

Janko was also a very positive social experience. I was able to visit with friends and family members I had not seen in years. I really appreciate the work done by Prajwal and all the others at the temple, Newar and non-Newar. The social aspects of the Janko ceremony seemed to have been enjoyed by all the guests western as well as Nepalese. Marc Thomas”

Hom Shrestha [hshrestha@laurentian.ca](mailto:hshrestha@laurentian.ca)  
to Marcus

Jan 6, 2019, 6:24 AM

Dear Respected Marcus and Betty

I am so grateful for sharing your milestone views and your experience on Bura Janko which is rare and fortune in everyone later in life. I will certainly keep in touch both of you. Kudo goes to our beloved priest Prajwol to connect both of you in my life. Of course, I am always praying for your continuing wellness and happy life as I am doing for all Bura Janko seniors around the world. Please bless me for my work on Bura Janko scientific research and writing book in the future. Warm regards, Hom

### **Appendix C First, Second and Third Bura Janko of Carleton S. Coon, United States**

Late Carleton S. Coon graduated from Harvard University in 1949 and promptly joined the U.S. Foreign Service. He spent almost thirty-seven years in a variety of posts extending from Morocco to Nepal, serving as ambassador to Nepal from 1981-84. After retiring in 1985, he initiated witness about the evolution of human society based on his anthropological experience and interest in evolutionary psychology. He advocates the idea that the whole world must now be viewed as “us” to cope with current global challenges. He contributed numerous reviews and essays for the Humanist with his challenges to fellow humanists coursing with a robust vitality as well as playfulness that communicated his overriding affection for humanity. He gave his last presentation to the AHA members at the 2017 conference and appealed to the AHA to shift its priorities to focus on advocating for climate action as an evolution humanist (Bardi, 2018).

**From:** Ellen Coon <[ellenjcoon@gmail.com](mailto:ellenjcoon@gmail.com)>

**Sent:** May 26, 2017 11:29 AM

**To:** Hom Shrestha

**Subject:** Re: Namaste from Suddbury, Laurentian University, North Ontario

Dear Hom Shrestha,

Thank you for your email, I hope you are well. Yes, indeed, my brother and I did perform third bura janko ceremony for my parents, in 2015. My brother built them a very beautiful two-seater rath without using a single nail, and we pulled them in it. We also did fire sacrifice, and we created large puppets of our parents to bring in the upstairs window. We did laskus. It was all wonderful.

With best wishes,

Ellen Coon

Ellen Coon <[ellenjcoon@gmail.com](mailto:ellenjcoon@gmail.com)>

Tue 2017-05-30 10:36 AM

You

PS. My father is a heart patient who was expected to pass away long ago. Instead he is doing well at 90 and he and my mother, who is 88, are living a happy old age. I believe the three bura janko ceremonies helped bring this about.

On Tue, May 30, 2017 at 9:35 AM, Ellen Coon <[ellenjcoon@gmail.com](mailto:ellenjcoon@gmail.com)> wrote:

Dear Hom Shrestha,

Thank you for your good and useful questions.

I believe that modified Bura Janko ceremonies have a great deal to offer Western people, who have no life-cycle rituals to celebrate the milestones of reaching old age.

The bura janko ceremony lessens the fear of death as it means that the old person will have an auspicious death and will have an easier afterlife.

The ceremony enhances self-esteem as the community gathers around to celebrate the old person, not in a weak way as in saying "happy birthday," but in a way that recognizes the elder as a powerful force for good in the community, to be revered and respected. Bowing to the old person and asking for blessings makes an exchange that recognizes the authority of the elder and the resources of his or her lifetime of experience.

The ceremony weaves and strengthens community around the elder, which is so lacking in this country.

I believe that the ceremony wards off cognitive decline, because isolation and loneliness make cognitive decline faster and worse. The ceremony ends isolation and puts the elder in the center of community. The elder, rather than feeling useless and abandoned, feels important to the future.

Of course, the person conducting the bura janko has to carefully adapt the ceremony for Westerners and to explain what is happening and its meaning.

I hope this is helpful to you and look forward to reading your paper. I should say that every time I've conducted a bura janko in this country, all the guests have had tears in their eyes and told me it was one of the most meaningful occasions of their lives.

All the best,  
Ellen Coon

## **Appendix D Essence of Metaphysical Science in Mudakopanishad**

What is that supreme spiritual science which being known all other worldly sciences become known. It is Para-Vidya or Brahman-Vidya, by which the Immortal Atman (divine soul) is known. Para-Vidhya is the science of the knowledge of Brahman (universe), the foundation of all knowledges or science of all sciences. Para is the knowledge of Brahman. Apara is that which treats of the means and fruits of good and bad actions. The object of the lower science is to show the cause of virtue and vice and their consequences.

The lower knowledge is the Rig-veda, the Samaveda, Yajurveda, Atharvaveda, Siksha (phonetics), Kalpa (code of rituals), Vyakarana (grammar), Nirukta (etymology), Chhandas (metre) and Jyotisha (astrology). But the higher knowledge is that by which the immortal is known.

Brahma-Vidya is called Para-Vidya, because it is a help to salvation, it leads to the attainment of the summum bonum. Para-Vidya is the knowledge of the immortal. The Para Vidya cannot be seen or seized, which has no origin, which has no properties, which has neither ear nor eye, which has neither hands nor feet, which is eternal, diversely manifested, all-pervading, extremely subtle and imperishable, the wise regard as the source of all beings. Brahman sees without eyes and hears without ears. Decay is not possible in Brahman, as it is ever full and self-contained.

### Glossary

Agam dyo	a God of deity or ancestor
Argha	an offering to the gods with mix of water, milk, piece of grass <i>kusha</i> , yogurt, uncooked rice, sesame oil, butter and barley
Atman	the Divine or Inner Self
Aatma chintan	a self-reflection and introspection
Aatma gyan (jnan)	a higher level of self-knowledge and consciousness
Autoethnography	a systematically or scientifically analysis of personal experience to understand cultural understanding or experiences
Bayar	palm-fruit
Bhima-Ratha-Rohan	a first Bura Janko ceremony at the age 77-years, seven-months, seven-days, seven-hours, seven-minutes and seven seconds
Brahman	the Divine Word, the Divine Reality, the Absolute
Brahmi	the ancient Hindu script or alphabet
Buddhism	a variety of traditions, beliefs and spiritual practices largely based on original teachings attributed to the Buddha
Chakati	seat of Bura Janko celebrant
Chandra-Ratha-Rohan	a second Bura Janko ceremony after seeing 1,000 full moon nights between 81 to 84 years of age
Chhwasu dyo	god of clean garbage
Charya Nritya	Buddhist Vajrayana sacred dance
CE	current era
Chitrakar	a painter or artist
Dakshina	a gift of coin or cash money
Deva-Ratha-Rohan	a third Bura Janko ceremony at the age of 88-years, eight-months, eight-days, eight hour, eight minutes and eight seconds
Dibya-Maha-Ratha-Rohan	a fifth Bura Janko ceremony at the age of 108-years, eight-months, eight-days, eight-hours, eight-minutes and eight-seconds
Dibya-Ratha-Rohan	a fourth Bura Janko ceremony at the age of 99-years, nine-months, nine-days, nine-hours, nine-minutes, and nine-seconds
Digu dyo	a lineage god or ancestral god of Hindu and Buddhist Newar people or community
Divinity	Divine status or near to god or god realization
Ganga Jal	Holy water from Holy Ganga River or Gangotri in India
Garga Samhita	Sacred scripture of Sage Garga
Graha	a heavenly body having an astrological influence.
Hinduism	the eternal tradition", or the "eternal way of life of the Hindu people and Hindu religion which is beyond human history
Homa	a sacred fire to worship of lord of fire
Jatra	a religious procession

Josi	an astrologer and assistant priest
Jwala Nhyakan	a sacred mirror of lighting or flaming
Kalas	a flask or sacred pot of holy water and religious flowers
Kailas	the world's only a sacred mountain where climbing and expedition is prohibited, located in Tibet across the Himalayas, near the source of most of the rivers of China, India and Nepal; and sacred place of Hindu, Buddhist, Jain religions
Kanyadaan	a sacred offer of a daughter to groom by the hand of father
Karma	an individual's condition or destiny as affected by that individual's actions in his or her current or previous
Khadgo	a line of death or zone of death
Kiga	purified uncooked husked rice grain, a basic material used in worship.
Krishna	an avatar or incarnation, hero of the Mahabharata
Laskusa	a welcoming ceremony in which a person or deity is met and conducted into a sacred area.
Maha-Ratha-Rohan	see Deva-Ratha-Rohan
Mahadev-Ratha-Rohan	see Dibya-Ratha-Rohan
Manasarovar	like in the Tibet below Kailas, near origin of the Sutlej river
Mandala	a circle, often thought to have special power concentrated within it.
Mandalic-Goddess	the eight Astamatrkas and nine planetary gods.
Mantra	a sacred sound, word, or phrase in Sanskrit having special power.
Meru	another name of Mount Kailas, the world-mountain or the north pole
Na bhuto na bhawisyati	neither past nor future
Naibaidya	beaten rice, sweet, piece of ginger, fruits, etc.
Nakshatras	lunar constellations
Nawagraha	nine planetary deities
Nepal Bhasa	a Newari native language or mother-tongue with combination of Tibetan, Burmese and Mongolian
Newar	ancient indigenous people of ancient Kathmandu valley or Nepal Mandal
Nepal Mandal	an ancient cities of Kathmandu, Lalitpur and Bhaktapur
Nirvana	salvation
Pancha Buddha	five lords of Buddha
Panko Pat	a betel leaf
Pancha Tatwo	five elements of life: fire, aqua, air, sky and earth or land
Panchamrit	a mixed of milk, ghee, honey, sugar or sakha (brown sugar) and yogurt
Paubha	a traditional religious painting made by the Newar people since nine centuries in Nepal



Pikha lakhu	a deified stone marking the front symbolic boundary of a house.
Pradaksinapatha	a traditional processional route in the city towards temples and shrines
Prajna-Paramita	a perfection or transcendent of wisdom or hymns of Lord Buddha
Pranayama	yogic control of the breath or life-force
Punhi	a full moon. The day of the full moon.
Purana	a class of Hindu texts, dating from the first millennium A.D. recounting stories of deities
Rahu	the north lunar node, a demon that causes eclipses, also called Swarbhanu
Rajopadhyaya	a family priest and Brahmin of Hindu Newar community
Rig-Veda	oldest of the four Vedas or scriptures of the Vedic Aryans, consisting of the mantras of the most ancient seers
Rishi	a seer or sage
Rudra	early Vedic form of the God Shiva; father of the Vedic Gods
Saharsha Chandra Darsan	see Chandra-Ratha-Rohan
Sanga or Sagun	a sacred dish includes, boiled egg, roasted dry fish, roasted a piece of buffalo meat, yogurt or a little drop of wine
Sait	an astrologically determined auspicious time to ritual procession of Bura Janko
Samhae	a mixture of foods, including meat and fish, presented to meat-eating deities.
Samskara	a rite of passage
Sam-Veda	second of the four Vedas, places mantras of the Rig Veda into a musical form
Sastra	a treatise specifying proper action in accord with the dharma.
Sattva	prime quality of light and clarity
Shiva	the destroyer in the Hindu trinity, vedic rudra often equivalent to vedic indra
Siddhi	the power to be effective, of a deity or religious procedure.
Sinha-mu	colour (red) used in religious ceremonies or for personal decoration with tiny pot
Sraddha	a ceremony commemorating deceased ancestors that includes offerings to them.
Sukunda	an antique oil lamp with image of Lord Ganesh for religious purposes only
Surya	the Vedic sun god, latin sol, Greek helios
Sutra	hymns or sacred words or phonetics
Swaga(n)	a mixture of yogurts, rice, pigment, etc., used as a decorative mark for the foreheads of deities and worshipers.
Tamas	a prime quality of darkness or inertia
Thakali	the senior-most among the members of patrilineal family
Thakali-Naki	the wife of Thakali

Thaya-bhu	a large plate which had eggs, yogurt, wine, fruits, Roti, meat, fish and much more
Tikka	Red-powder or yellow-powder to put forehead of God and Goddess and man and woman in Hindu and Buddhist culture
Tilhari	a necklace of gold with red beads
Tyaa	Fried paddy or white rice
Twadewa	a brass oil lamp stands in both side of main door or pikha lakhu
Upanishads	Last portion of the Vedas, revealing the hidden spiritual meaning of the mantras
Vajracharya	a family priest and Guruju of Buddhist Newar community
Vajra	a lightning bolt
Varuna	ancient Vedic god, cognate with Greek Uranus, ruler of the ocean
Vayu	Vedic god of the wind, breath or life-spirit
Veda	spiritual knowledge
Veda Vyas	a "splitter of the Vedas", creator of Mahabharat and the greatest sage born in the land of western Nepal in Vedic Era
Vedanta	spiritual system behind the vedas
Vishnu	the preserver in the later Hindu trinity; in the Vedas a for of the Sun God
Vrata	an austerity, such as fasting
Yajna	Vedic sacrifice, inwardly the practice of Yoga
Yajur veda	the Veda of sacrifice, adds ritualistic mantras to those of the Rig Veda
Yama	Vedic God of the dead and form of the original man, like Egyptian Osiris
Yantra	a complex diagram of mystic significance and power
Yo-Mori	favourite sweet made of rice, sesame seeds and brown sugar during the shortest day of full moon day in between last week of December and first weekend of January every year

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