Ritual Period: A Comparative Study of Three Newar Buddhist Menarche Manuals

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Continuing further on the path laid out by Michael Allen’s pioneering work on rituals that centre on Newar Buddhist girl children in Nepal, this study analyses liturgies pertaining to a religious practice called ‘bārha pikāyagu’ that ends a period of seclusion undergone by Newar girls before menarche. The article looks at three ritual manuals currently used by Buddhist priests in Lalitpur, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, respectively. In its aim to supply a textual background to Allen’s ethnography of this ritual, the study tries to place these manuals at the conjunction of other ritual textual genres, such as prescriptions for domestic rituals for women that include cosmological, demonological and pregnancy-related aspects, and attempts to explore their composition, their intention and their place within the larger ritual literature of Buddhism among the Newars.

Keywords: Nepal; Newars; Buddhism; ritual; children; girl child; manuals; menarche

Introduction

For the Newars of Nepal, rituals for girls play anything but a minor role in the self-perception of their religious world and in the way they locate themselves in the world at large. The Kumārī, popularly known outside Nepal as the ‘Living Goddess’, a Tantricised clan goddess embodied by a Newar Buddhist girl child, is perhaps one of the most widely known representatives of Newar religion. A practice called ihi, meaning ‘marriage’, in which Newar girl children undergo a wedding involving a fruit, is a tradition that is perceived by the Newars as one of the pillars of their ethnic identity and uniqueness. And it is to Michael Allen that we owe the most ground-breaking studies of both the Kumārī and of ihi. It is no exaggeration to say that the study of the ritual culture of Newar girl children properly begins with Allen, whose work this special issue celebrates. Given the size of this sub-field in the study of Newar religion, to those who, unlike me, have not actually made this sub-field their own, this may sound like a rather modest claim. However, to give some idea of the impact Michael Allen’s work has had on the Newars themselves, particularly his 1982 article, ‘Girls’ Pre-Puberty...
Rites among the Newars of Kathmandu Valley, a single concrete example may suffice: an elaborately designed invitation card I received on one of my stays in Nepal. The English text runs:

Mr. Birendra and Mrs. Sharmila Shrestha request the pleasure at the Dinner on the auspicious occasion of Surya Darshan (Pre-Puberty Rites) of our daughters Elisa and Pritty Shrestha on the 25th Jan. 2005 (12th Magh)

‘Pre-puberty rites’ was a generic term introduced by Allen in the title of his pioneering study to denote two gender-specific religious practices that Newar girls undergo before puberty, of which one is ihi. The invitation’s text shows us that the term has been taken up by the Newars themselves to denote a ritual that would have traditionally been known only by its name in Sanskrit, sūryadarśana (the [reciprocal] viewing of the sun [god and the worshipper]), or in Newar, bārhā pikāyagu (the taking out of bārhā, a term that will be discussed below). It is this very ritual that will stand at the centre of this article.

The main aim of this article is to direct our attention to the ‘textualisation’ of bārhā. I use the term here in the sense Catherine Bell does when she writes that “textualization” refers to the generation of textual objects that structure social interactions around their use and transmission. It is Allen himself who only recently gave us a first glimpse of how a priest would describe bārhā, including the liturgy and the texts recited. While bārhā-specific liturgical texts may not necessarily fall within the range of interest of ethnographers such as


2My decision in favour of using ‘Newar’ (New.) to designate the language spoken and written by the Newars follows the proposal of two relatively recent monographs on Newar linguistics. See Austin Hale and Kedār P. Shrestha, Newār (Nepal Bhāsa) (München: Lincom Europa, 2006); and Carol Genetti, A Grammar of Dolakha Newar (Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007). They distance themselves from the indigenous ‘Nepal Bhāsa’ and ‘NevaからないBhāya’, the more academic ‘Newari’ (viz. ‘Newārī’) or the Indological ‘Nevaならない’. The difference that Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels draw in Growing Up. Hindu and Buddhist Initiation Rituals among Newar Children in Bhaktapur, Nepal (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2008), between written ‘Newārī’ and spoken ‘Nevaならない’, is, in my eyes, artificial and is backed neither by indigenous Newar discourse nor academic linguistic evidence (p. 3).

3In this article, Newar words are transliterated following the conventions laid out by the two standard dictionaries, Kamal P. Malla et al. (eds), A Dictionary of Classical Newari Compiled from Manuscript Sources (Kathmandu: Nepal Bhasa Dictionary Committee, 2000), p. 326; and Ulrike Köhler and Iswarananda Shresthacarya, with the assistance of Daya Ratna Sakya and Nirmal Man Tuladhar, A Dictionary of Contemporary Newari, Newari–English (Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag, 1994). Hence, the text has -ɾ to represent nasals where others may use superscribed ŋ and features -m to orthographically distinguish the short from the long nasal sound. Generally, -va-/ -va is used instead of -o- and -ya-/ -ya instead of -e-. In quotes, however, the transliteration follows the orthography of the original. I have chosen to retain the sometimes highly idiosyncratic, often simply miswritten original form in order not to formally complicate the representation of the texts, which in most cases would have required intensive annotation. Where the spelling is so deviant as to obscure the meaning, emendations are proposed.


Gérard Toffin or Robert Levy, one is struck by the omission of the textual side of bärhā in the otherwise strongly text-oriented work on Newar life-cycle rituals by Niels Gutschow and Axel Michaels. Against their authors’ intentions, Allen’s pioneering study and those of others could suggest, merely because they do not deal with texts, that bärhā is a ritual based exclusively on oral transmission. The present article will show that this is not the case and that at least a crucial part of bärhā indeed has its own ritual literature. The article will proceed by first giving a sketch of bärhā from the perspective of its participants. It will then compare three manuals, owned, used and, in part, authored by Buddhist Newar priests (vajraśāṅkhyas) today and attempt to define the individual ways in which bärhā is understood liturgically in these texts. Cosmography, demonology, instruction, menstruation and conception will be the key terms that will characterise the readings of what bärhā is all about from the perspective of the male Buddhist ritual specialist. The study will finally show how these readings help to embed bärhā as a life-cycle ritual within the understanding of the ritual career of a woman as formalised by domestic ritual culture.

**Bärhā without Texts**

It is to Allen’s credit that he presented us with the first elaborate account of bärhā pikāyagu based on several performances. His ethnography covers a whole series of rites, including the two called bärhā tayagu, or ‘placing into bärhā’, and the bärhā cvanegu, or ‘staying in bärhā’. In terms of liturgical sequence, the latter two precede ‘the taking out of bärhā’. Following vernacular Newar usage, I will be referring to the whole set of rites by the more generic term, bärhā.9

The strength of Allen’s account is in its clear social and historical localisation of the events he describes. This makes his ethnography an important source on how bärhā was performed among the Buddhists of Lalitpur in the 1970s. The most recent and so far most detailed descriptive account, based on a collation of several performances among the urban peasant caste (jyāpu) community of the Kathmandu Valley settlement of Bhaktapur between 2003 and 2007, was presented by Gutschow and Michaels. Though, for the purpose of the present study, it is essential to give at least a vague idea of what the actual performance of bärhā looks like, I will refrain from going into too much detail about the actual staging of the event for two reasons. The first is that the performances are highly variable, depending on the conditions of their occurrence in historical time and their religious, local, caste and class affiliations. Writing about bärhā ‘as such’, by limiting oneself to what all ethnographically recorded events may have in common, runs the risk of producing an account that comes close to what normative texts such as ritual manuals themselves may aim at doing—without, however, being self-consciously normative as the manual is by its own definition. The second reason is that this article will be dealing with exactly these kinds of texts, ritual manuals. For

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9 The one earlier study by Gopal Singh Nepali, The Newars. An Ethno-Sociological Study of a Himalayan Community (Bombay: United Asia Publications, 1965), pp. 112–6, does not give more than a sketchy picture of what happens, or is supposed to happen, in bärhā and remains silent about the provenance and localisation of the data presented.
such an understanding, designing an ideal–typical bārha based on Western academic ethnographic data, with which the normative ethnographic texts would then unavoidably compete and would have to be confronted, appears to me unhelpful. It would be equally unhelpful to focus on the record of one or other historical singular event that may turn out to have only a very faint connection to what a priest wrote down following his own textual lineage or his ambitions for liturgical innovation. By contrast, closely scrutinising how one particular text may have been employed for and during one particular historical performance of bārha would make for a highly interesting and commendable scholarly enterprise towards comprehending the pragmatics of liturgical implementation. Nevertheless, we must acknowledge that regarding bārha, we are not yet even in a position to do this. At least as important as engaging with the pragmatics of texts is to start reading them in the first place. And this is what, at least so far, no study of bārha, either by Western scholars or by academically-trained younger Nepalese scholars, has done. This is as if to suggest that in bārha, there is nothing but performance, that texts do not occur or, at the very best, do not really matter. This article will try to show that they do.

For all these reasons, the account I give of bārha consciously echoes ways of talking about it recorded by me and others over the last decade, rather than ‘what actually happens’. Some people say that the most important part in bārha is the event I received the abovementioned invitation to: a concluding party with lots of food and drink, in which the girls being celebrated are heavily beautified with gold, brocade and make-up and prominently displayed to family, neighbours and friends. Others say that what it is really about is the period before that, which the girl, alone or in a group, spends inside a room of the familial home. The normative number of days given is 12, but the actual time varies considerably, right down to a day or two. The description of that period varies too. For some, mostly males, the girls there learn about female sexuality from their seniors. For others, mostly women, the girl children are expected to accomplish certain domestic votive or expiatory ritual tasks, including worship, with the servicing and supervision of the girls themselves representing a major challenge for the other women of the household. For many girl children, it is about (happily?) missing school, naughtily trying to elude the restrictions placed on them by the seniors during the period, and having fun with friends and cousins, but also about experiencing boredom. Among the restrictions are various forms of dieting, the prohibition on adult males, both in person and as images, from sharing the room, and a series of rules governing insulation from sunlight, such as allowing the use of artificial light, with the acceptance of the use of TV sets still being contested at the time of

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11 Among the Nepalese academic studies on bārha are Jānt Maiya Maharjan, Nevaḥ samājay bārha sanskāra (Yala [Laļītpur]: Nhū hisu pucah, NS 1128, VS 2064 [2007]); and Shradha Chipala, Barha Ritual (Laļītpur: Nhoo hisu pucah, 2007). The journal of the national association of the Buddhist Sākya caste had a special issue dedicated to bārha, Sākya 9,2. Ṛtupau (mukhpatra) (NS 1127, VS 2064 [May 2007]).

12 This is an inadequately brief overview of the multitude of voices I recorded on the most diverse occasions between 2004 and today, talking about or just briefly referring to bārha, and mostly reflect first reactions at the beginning of more detailed conversations on the topic. The majority, but by no means all the speakers whose comments I have here very roughly paraphrased, hail from upper-caste, middle- to lower-middle-class Hindu and Buddhist Newar families in Laļītpur, Kathmandu and Bhaktapur, including the highly socially mobile urban farmer communities.

13 There is no space here to elaborate upon the other prominent narrative which is presented in conversations, usually with Newar men, about bārha: that of bārha as a dangerous practice that may lead to the death of the girl child, her subsequent transformation into a ghost called the bārha si, and the appropriate rituals to prevent such an occurrence. I have analysed the role of gender, demonology, and rumour in contemporary forms of male discourse on bārha in my monograph Buddhist Rituals for Newar Girls. Mimesis and Memory in the Kathmandu Valley (Leiden: E. J. Brill, forthcoming).
An event which featured surprisingly low on most participants’ lists of what makes up bārhā and referred to mostly (for reasons to become evident below) by ritual specialists, is the moment in which the women lead the girl children out of their seclusion and, in an open space, make them engage ritually with images of the sun god and the sun itself, thus performing the sūryadarśana mentioned above. The event of the girls, dressed up in party finery and posed with a ritual implement in each hand, presenting themselves at the local Gaṇeśa shrine after publicly paying homage to the deity, is a feature usually not separately pointed out when talking about bārhā, but is usually staged and recorded visually and archived in family photo albums or private VCD collections. It represents the most prominent and most widely-circulated visual record of bārhā (Figures 1–7).

The most frequent connotation of bārha, either in popular or scholarly discourse, is a vague and only tentatively elaborated connection with the onset of the first menstrual period of the girl(s) who stand(s) at the centre of attention. The strongest and most obvious link in

![Figure 1](image-url)
FIGURE 2. ‘Exiting the Bārhā Room’ (‘bāhrā [sic] kotham pihāṁvāvā cvamgu’).

FIGURE 3. ‘Performing the Darśana of the Reflection of Sūrya’ (‘sūryabimba darśana yānācvamgu’).
FIGURE 4. ‘Performing Manḍala Worship’ (‘ḥalam ḍanā cva[m]gu’).

FIGURE 5. ‘Going to Gaṇeṣa’ (‘gaṇedyoke vana cvamgu’).
that direction is the timing of bārhā. The ritual is expected to be performed well before menarche or as an abbreviated emergency ritual in case menarche takes place without the proper previous ritual care having been provided by bārhā. But even here, the discussions among both female and male ritual specialists and the girl children’s family members I witnessed focused on getting it done at the proper age, rather than before a certain event. Often the topic would arise casually, for instance when commenting ‘how big your daughter has become’, to which was added the question whether it would be time to have her do bārhā.

Highlighting menarche as a deadline for bārhā appears to impose a rather artificial stress of the technicalities of purity laws upon the forms of ordinary conversation on this topic. In my eyes, this stress is in fact occasionally imported, either from the domain of ritual specialists talking shop or performing authority by referring to ritual rule, or is the influence of a popularised self-ethnographising idiom (such as the one used in the invitation card) occasionally found among the urban middle class. Other links, such as supposed sexual symbolism, the comparison with menstrual seclusion practices common in other South Asian communities or, more concretely, indications given by the texts, may be crucial for the ethnographic, historical and even textual contextualisation of bārhā. However, compared to the scholarly preoccupation with sexuality, most prominently on the part of Michael Allen, but also by Levy, Gutschow and Michaels, I have found that in the understanding, imagination, experience and memory of bārhā among its immediate, particularly female Newar participants, menarche, not to speak of sexual intercourse, seem to be conspicuously absent. That does not mean, however, that horizons may not have shifted, and it is the texts that may shed some light on some of these shifts.
Finding the Words for Bārhā

But first of all, how do we find out that a certain text, in this specific case a manual, pertains to a certain event? What is the text that ‘goes with’ bārhā in the sense that a manual ‘goes with’ that for which it is a manual? The equivalent to the smoking gun would be that the ritual specialist brings that text to the event where the performance of bārhā is set to occur. The connection is even closer if the ritual specialist looks through it and if we have evidence that the ritual decisions are informed by that referential reading—in other words, if the text is ‘consulted’. But the text may also just stay in the bag. Or it may have been left at home and, in that case, the connection may have to be established via a conversation in which we would identify the text the ritual specialist may have brought along or that text in his archive that is considered to be the manual ‘for’ bārhā. Now, in the case of performances of bārhā, I observed that ritual specialists carried their manual along less often than for other rituals. There are several reasons for that. One is that the ritual specialist who conducts bārhā may not be literate. He or, as we shall see, she may be either not literate at all or not literate regarding

FiguRE 7. ‘Setting the Maṇḍala of the Celestial Bodies’ (‘grahamāṇḍala yujyāṇā evamgu’). This image represents the sequence on which the manuals focus and is the first in the set of bārhā sequences. It lists the captions for the subsequent images and, in the caption in the top banner, uses the term garbhādhāna as the name for the event depicted.
ritual manuals and, instead, rely on orally transmitted instructions. That may be the case for those families in which the most senior women run the show from beginning to end. However, if a male priest is involved, there usually is a text; yet, many priests whose bārhā performances I attended simply did not bring theirs along. I have been told more than once that this event is not that long and so does not involve a great many things that need to be kept in mind. Indeed, the ritually literate priest’s service does not usually require him to perform for more than a couple of hours. Unlike other comparable rituals such as ihi, the marriage of a girl child involving a bilva fruit referred to above, there is no fire sacrifice. The fire sacrifice is usually the activity for which the most intense consultation of manuals is required. In short, in all cases, but one, I had to rely on the priest bringing me the text he claimed referred to bārhā. And in all cases, the text only referred to the part of it that the priest was responsible for.

What removes the bārhā manuals (if one could even designate them as such) from the event as a whole is the fact that only a fraction, indeed less than a twelfth, of the entire event is represented or covered by the manual or, historically speaking, textualised. In that sense, these texts cannot be called ‘bārhā manuals’ at all, at least not in the sense in which we may talk about ‘wedding manuals’, ‘manuals for the ordination of boys’ (bāre chuyegu) or other Newar household rituals. Bārhā is the colloquial term used to refer to the entire event: the ritual measures that lead to and comprise seclusion, as well as those that lead out of and end seclusion. The texts under scrutiny here are manuals only for the latter, the ‘bringing out of bārhā’ (bārhā pikayagu).

The term bārhā itself is a bit of a puzzle. The Dictionary of Contemporary Newari lists the word as bārāh (giving as variants bārhā and bāhrāh) and, unsurprisingly, gives its meaning as the ‘period of confining the girl for 12 days in a dark room before the first menstruation’.14 Though bārhā may be the colloquial short form referring to the combined complex of placing in, staying in and taking out of bārhā, one wonders what bārhā itself means exactly.15 If tayagu, cvanegu, and pikayagu refer to placing in, staying in and taking out of ‘bārhā’, the term would then, in the narrow sense, refer to a place, a situation or a status relative to which these activities take place. One should not, however, dismiss too easily the possibility that bārhā may refer to the person who is put in and taken out. There is no exact match with other semantically related or phonetically similar terms. The Dictionary of Classical Newari gives bārā as a ‘deadline’ that can actually be ‘set’ (taye) as in the example it gives: ‘Setting a deadline of two and a half months’, ‘nilātyā bārā tayāo’.16 In a similar semantic field, we find bāhra17 denoting ‘a fence, a barrier’, ‘a long thin wooden or metal piece used as a bolt to secure a door’, ‘a feeling of pollution or separation from pollution’, ‘i.e. the separation of a woman in the menstrual period’, ‘to observe some kind of conduct against pollution’; it derives from Nepali bārnu, meaning ‘to limit, to enclose’, but also ‘to refrain from, to give

15 I do not see any backing for the translation of bārhā as ‘cave’ that Gutschow and Michaels propose (Gutschow and Michaels, Growing Up, p. 174), except if one wished to somehow transfer the Nepali word guphā (‘cave’) used in the term for the Indo-Parbatiya menstruation ritual, guphā rakhe (‘placing into a cave’), onto the Newari bārhā tayagu.
up’, in turn derived from Skt. var, ‘to cover, to hold back’, and vārayati, ‘he excludes’, via Pkt. vārei. Accordingly, the word bārāy or bārāhe yāye, derived from the same Nepali verb, could mean ‘to observe restrictive measures’. And finally there is bārham (or bārām, bāhrām) meaning ‘alms’ as used in the expression bārham chuye, ‘to give alms’.

However, if one looks for a connection between the name for the event and the title or contents of the manuals in question, one would be surprised, as I was, to find not a single text that includes bārham in the title. What one finds, instead, is the mysterious term vādhā included in titles such as ‘Vādhā byamke vidhi’ or simply ‘Vādhā byamkegu’. The word byamkegu means ‘to cause to release’ and is thus very close to pikāyagū, ‘to bring out’. Yet, the latter may refer more directly to the girl children being moved from inside to outside, while the former may allow for more general connotations. Vādhā seems to be very much the key term of the manual and across manuals: it is what the manual is meant to primarily deal with and to perform. In fact, the girl protagonist that the text refers to, if she features at all, is called homologously simply ‘the vādhā’ or ‘the vālha’ or, more explicitly, ‘the vādha macā’, ‘the vādhā child’. The meaning of vādhā here is far from clear, but it most likely is Sanskrit, found both as badha and bādhā, as well as with variant initial va-, meaning ‘pain, suffering, addiction’ or ‘disturbance, molestation, annoyance’, ‘harm, injury, damage, hurt’, but also ‘hindrance, resistance, distress’. Especially in the technical sense of a harm-causing hindrance, the term occurs particularly frequently in medical and astrological Sanskrit literature in cases where the imbalance of humours or the unfortunate constellation of celestial bodies may lead to a blockage of some sort. Siegfried Lienhard rules out a historical change from Skt. vādhā to New. bārham and, instead, suspects that the term is a rather recent assimilation of the Nepali word for ‘twelve’ (bāhra; Hin. bārhā), referring to the 12 days of confinement, making bārhā tayagu mean ‘to place [a girl] into [a seclusion lasting] 12 days’. One cannot exclude that the more conservative Sanskrit term preserved in the manuals may have been re-read as representing Nepali ‘twelve’ by those not familiar with its textual form.

We will have to see how such a name fits with what actually goes on in these manuals, and yet be aware of an ambiguity the term bādha may contain. On the one hand, it could refer to a hindrance as represented by the activities preceding the ritual itself, which, simply put,

21 Köler and Shresthacarya, A Dictionary of Contemporary Newari, p. 234; and Manandhar and Vergati, Newari–English Dictionary, p. 175.
26 (‘in Mädchen in die zwölf Tage (dauernde Pubertätsquarantäne) setzen’). See Lienhard, ‘Dreimal Unreinheit’, p. 12, supported by Kashinath Tamot, personal communication, 2006. Against vādha > bārhā, Lienhard notes here that Skt. d can become New. r or r, not dh or rh. However, the occurrence of the variant valha for vādha in manuals, reflecting an affinity found often in Newar between -l- and -r-, would give reason to assume a development along the lines of bādha > vādha/valha > bārhā.
involves releasing (piṅkāye) girls who were kept from (bārhā) going out. Alternatively, the ritual could be supposed to release (byanke) an underlying hindrance (vādā, bāḍā) that is not co-extensive with, or reducible to, the girl children being secluded, but one which the whole ritual of bārha, both the seclusion of the girls and what happens during their release, is supposed to deal with. Things become more differentiated when, following our earlier methodological ruminations, we consider the additional designations found in the manuals themselves.

We now turn to several manuals currently in use. One text (henceforth VBV-Badri) has ‘Vādāḥ bhyaṃ ke vidhi’ on its cover, dates from 1979 (NS 1099) and was authored by the Kathmandu-based priest, Badriratna Bajracharya.27 The other almost homonymous printed text (henceforth VBV-Buddha) was written by Buddharatna Bajracharya from Lalitpur. It is distributed as Xerox copies of a text handwritten on exercise book paper and features ‘Vādāḥ bhyaṃke vidhi’ on its opening page.28 Finally, we look at a handwritten thyāsaphā manuscript (henceforth VB-Gyana), a common leporello-style Newar book format, produced by the father of the Bhaktapur priest, Gyanaratna Bajracharya, in 1908–09 (NS 1029). It has ‘Vādāḥ byemkegu’ written in the centre of an otherwise blank folio 11, which is where the book would have its ‘cover’.29 All three works repeat that designation at the beginning of the text, either directly in the first line or immediately after the preliminary invocation of Vajrasattva.

However, each also refers individually to what else is going on. VB-Gyana contains a diagram outlining the spatial design of the ritual arena, indicating that it is for the purpose of ‘an expiatory rite [dealing with] the uterine (garbha) blood (hi)’ (garbha hi prāyaścitā (VB-Gyana, f1)). Expiation rites usually use the language of cleansing and the most likely reading of this heading would be as a reference to cleansing made necessary due to the pollution caused by menstrual blood.30 On the other hand, with the connection between womb and embryo, also contained in the multivalent term garbha and mediated by the uterine blood conceived of in South Asian doctrines of sexuality as the female procreative liquid, one should not readily exclude that such a cleansing may have to do at least as much with the conditions for conceiving a child as it may have to do with the ritual defilement during the monthly period. But would not both readings be referring to things that would be premature to expect from a premenstrual girl? While at the end of the text, VBV-Buddha, as if in an afterthought, adds some verses meant to go with what is called the vālāḥ vyamke, pointing to a divergent spelling of the term used in the beginning, it however ends the instructions proper by stating that what ends (samāpta) here is ‘the short version of the vow of Strāyā consisting in the liberation from evil of her who is marked by the flower’ (‘puspāvati pāpamocana sāryāvrata smaksipta’ (VBV-Buddha, f5)). We may get an inkling of what kind of flower Buddharatna could be talking about when we look at the last lines of Badriratna’s text, which also refer to a vow. He concludes a text that he here calls in no uncertain terms the ‘instructions for the vow [dealing with] menstruation’ (‘raja svalā brata vidhi’ (VBV-Badri, 4)), rajasvalā being the Sanskrit term for the menstrual period.

The ‘flower’ (‘puspa’) is a poetic-sounding term commonly used in the grhyasūtras for menstrual

30 In contemporary Newar, besides the more popular expressions referring to ritual impurity and the ritual ‘untouchability’ of a woman during her period such as thtāmji juye, another expression used to denote menstruating is called ‘to drip blood’ (hi kvahām vaye).
bleeding and for the period in general.31 Hence, ‘puspāvait’, ‘she who bears the flower’, would be another term for a menstruating woman. In fact, rajasvalā too may refer not just to the period, but to the woman who is having her period. It is Buddharatna’s text that further specifies the manual as one that removes the harmful cause (papa) of the pernicious effects menstruation is ritually seen as having on the woman or, one should assume, on others. It is this potentially harmful side of menstruation which these manuals seem to be dealing with, which resonates most distinctly with the ‘obstruction’, the ‘bādhā’ or ‘vādhā’, which this ritual in its most dominant designation, vādhā byamke, is supposed to remove. A possible lead one could follow is that the ritual removes the obstructions which may hinder the menstrual flow and which cause the polluting menstrual blood to clog up. Instead, it may aim at facilitating the flow and so bringing the period to an auspicious ending. In that sense, it is not menstruation that causes harm, but its unhandled, ‘untreated’, ritually unmediated manifestation. But, although the menstrual connection looks dominant, there is a secondary, but not negligible, direction in which these multiple designations point. Assuming that here the word for the sun, or the male sun god, sūrya, is not erroneously spelt with a final, feminine -ā instead of masculine -a, Buddharatna’s reference to a sūryā vrata connects this votive rite with the figure of Sūrya, the protagonist of the R̄gveda hymn, which deals with the wedding of the sun god’s daughter, verses from which are embedded in the standard gṛhyasūtra wedding liturgy.32 This could indicate that we are not just talking about a ritual dealing with the monthly recurring ritual troubles of the period, but with marriage, possibly even with the compounded troubles of menstruation and marriage.

The Latter Day’s Liturgy

Almost all ‘bārhā manuals’ start in medias res, as if there had been no yesterday, no preceding period of seclusion. Only VBV-Badri briefly states that, as he spells it, vādhā byam ke takes place on the twelfth day of vādhā tāya (‘vādhā tāya jhimninhu khunhu’ (VBV-Badri, f1)). This is a peculiar aspect of these manuals: it is as if they shy away from all the ritual activity that precedes their descriptions. While in manuals for other domestic rites, particularly in those transmitted by Buddharatna (for example, in the manual dealing with the wedding ritual involving the bilva fruit), there is a tendency to expand the text’s descriptive–prescriptive reach beyond the ritual arena, these manuals by contrast seem to be very concerned with confining themselves only to the activities that take place between the girl’s emergence from her confinement to her concluding meal. They do not mention the usual festivities on the following day, in which the daughters are presented to the extended family and beyond, nor do they refer to the ritual management of the girl’s confinement. It seems as if those activities do not require textualisation. Perhaps, more accurately, they represent domains occupied by agents other than the male priest. These activities are ruled by laws and customs and interfering with them is precluded by a tacit acceptance of a gendered division of ritual labour. In the case of this ritual, the extent of textualisation is clearly a matter of gender.

Badriratna’s text may include the reference to the 12 days as it is formulated in a different register from ordinary, traditional manuals: it comes with an introduction that includes some cultural–historical details and, in contrast to the other texts, has no opening salutation verse. It may be a conscious reflection of the fact that it represents an early, perhaps the earliest, example of translation of a bārhā manual from manuscript form to the medium of print for

distribution to a wider public beyond the priestly community. The other manuals begin with
the standard homage to Vajrasattva, but also, in the case of VBV-Buddha, one to the sun god,33
anticipating the large role this deity will play throughout the texts. Accordingly, all the
manuals feature the ritual ‘exchange of glances’ (‘darśana’) with and worship (pājā) of
Sūrya,34 following which they then schedule the girl’s worship of the preceptor’s circle
(gurumandalapājā). It is here that for the first time, the girl child is mentioned and referred to
as ‘the vādhā child’ (‘vādhā macā’), or simply as ‘child’ (‘macā’) or, singularly at this one
point in the liturgy, ‘the girl student’ (‘śīyā’). Buddharaṭna’s text expects there will be several
‘students’ who are to be placed on their seats decorated with the ubiquitous South Asian
representation of the sun, the svastika (śīyapīṃ svastīsa tayō (V BV-Buddha, 1)). This is the
moment in the sequential periphery of the gurumandalapājā when the girl enters into a
relationship with her teacher as her ritual preceptor and when the term ‘student’ would be the
marker of the transition. The girls are described as students by Buddharaṭna when they take
their seats before the gurumandalapājā, whereas Badriratna calls them students only later,
when they receive their ritual ‘seasoning’ (‘adhivāsana’) through, as in Gyanaratna’s text, the
Five Cow Products (paṅcagavya). The Five Cow Products, utilised in nearly every Newar rite,
is a staple ritual substance consisting of cow’s urine, dung, clarified butter, milk and yoghurt
employed generally for ritual cleansing.35 We shall see later that while in Badriratna, this is
referred to only in one line, and Buddharaṭna does not refer to it at all, Gyanaratna’s text takes
this opportunity to introduce an elaborate passage that in a way becomes the signature of his text.

Next, in all three manuals, comes the worship of the main ritual implements: the mirror,
the vermillion powder box and the light, followed by the worship of the circle of Sūrya (sūrya
maṇḍala), both of which are further expanded upon by Buddharaṭna. The worship of Sūrya
occurs in all three texts, but with a rather divergent set of verses. VBV-Badri and VBV-Buddha
share only a fraction of a verse, rathā saptāśvara (VBV-Badri, 1) and saptā aśvaratha (VBV-
Buddha, f2), while VBV-Gyana has a completely different text (VBV-Gyana, f8–9). Then, while
VB-Gyana has a list dedicated exclusively to the moon god, VBV-Badri and VBV-Buddha
follow up with verses dedicated to all the planetary deities (the grahas), starting with Sūrya or
Āditya and ending with the lunar shadow planets, Rāhu and Ketu, in VBV-Badri and with
Śaniṣcara (Saturn) in VBV-Buddha. The latter adds an additional list beginning with
Meghātkāra and ending with Kṛtkā (VBV-Buddha, f2–3). VBV-Badri continues with the
constellations (the nakṣatras (VBV-Badri, f2)), a list of minor threatening deities.36 Then
VBV-Badri and VBV-Buddha coincide again, featuring a list of the Ten Guardians of the
World Directions (dīgpālas) beginning with Indra, which VBV-Badri abbreviates and VBV-
Buddha merges with a list of names for Sūrya.37 VBV-Gyana proceeds differently and, after its
invocation of the moon god, returns with a long hymn in praise of Sūrya (VBV-Gyana, f14–5).
Only then does it join VBV-Buddha in listing the constellations, as VBV-Badri had done

33 Om namah śīrṣāmya namah, VBV-Buddha, f1.
34 Sūryaṁ yata laḥṣimkā gudā pājā yañā, VBV-Badri, f1; Śrī sūrya darśana yāke, VBV-Buddha, f1; Śrīśīrye
darasaṇa biyā, VBV-Gyana, f2.
35 For its occurrence in the grhyasūtra literature, see, for e.g., Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol. 2.2,
pp. 773–4. For Nepal, see Dilli Raman Regmi, Medieval Nepal. A History of the Three Kingdoms 1520 A.D. to
Avalokitēsvarā-Matsyendranātha in the Valley of Kathmandu (Kathmandu: Sahayogi Prakashan for the Research
Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University, 1980), p. 75, with a reference to its cleansing
(sodhana) power.
36 Om deva graḥitāya svāhā. om pāya graḥitāya svāhā. om aṣṭra graḥitāya svāhā. […] VBV-Badri, 2–3.
37 VBV-Badri, 3 abbreviates to om indrāya svāhā itādy. om indrāya svāhā; om yamāya svāhā; om varuṇāya svāhā.
…om sūryāya namah svāhā. om divākāryāya namah svāhā (VBV-Buddha, 3).
earlier. VBV-Badri and VBV-Buddha seem to converge again in what Buddharatna’s text calls the ‘Worship of the Red-One’ (‘raktamaya pūja’ (VBV-Buddha, 3)). Gyanaratna here (VB-Gyana, f19) features only a brief reference to the vermillion powder box, noting that ‘the seniormost female should apply the vermillion powder’ (‘nakinām sīhnā cāyake’ (VB-Gyana, 19)). Badriratna and Buddharatna share a reference to the deployment of a whole range of red-coloured materials such as flowers, sacred thread, brick and vermilion, as well as to items such as areca nuts, clay cups with uncooked rice and a coin, bread, flowers, fruit, etc. in sets of twelve. Both start what is marked as an offering (argha) with ‘he dharma’ and ‘ye dharmma’, respectively, while Buddharatna begins with a stotra that lists the twelve names of Śrīya.

Only once that is concluded do we find in Buddharatna and Badriratna a set of verses that overlap. It is only now that we begin to see markedly Buddhist features in the verses such as the obeisance to the Three Jewels in Buddharatna’s text and regular references in both to the Buddha (bhagavan). But the divergences in this obviously shared core verse material, which point to a common transmission somewhere in the past, as well as the orthography, are strikingly dissonant. Gyanaratna has an entirely different set of verses to accompany the offering to the sun god. Towards the end, just before the shared reference to an offering (argha) to Ādiya-Śrīya, Badriratna’s verses include a line that self-referentially mentions the purpose of these lines of worship. The line recalls and brings together elements from other passages found in very different places in both Buddharatna’s and Gyanaratna’s texts (in the appendix of the former and in the diagram included at the beginning of the latter): ‘for the purpose of the upholding of the vow [for the purpose] of being liberated by a rite of atonement [following] menstruation’ (‘raja svala prāyaścittā mocana brata dhāraṇārtham’ (VBV-Badri, 3)).

The next round of worship Badriratna and Buddharatna call the ‘Worship of the Conch Dish’ (‘śaṁkha bahepuja’, following the Newar variant orthography of the word for worship) or the ‘Worship of the Conch’ (‘śaṁkhapuja’, respectively. Not much is elaborated here (and Gyanaratna has nothing of this), except for Buddharatna writing that one should ‘give an ablation’ (‘abhiṣeka biye’ (VBV-Buddha, f4)) ‘to the conch’. Again the verses diverge, but a version of Badriratna’s verse invoking the sun god in his chariot at dawn is actually added by Buddharatna in the appendix and called ‘Verse in Praise of Śrīya’ (‘śūryāyā stotra’):

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38 Ḥyāṁgu svām, Ḥyāṁgu jajāṅka, Ḥyāṁgu īśāhaṁgu sinha (VBV-Buddha, 3); Sinha jajāṅka svāma naivadaya marī sīsā phala sinha, (VB-Vadri, Badri, 3).

39 Gvāla 12 kisāl, naiveda, 12 tā madhi, 12 phalabhāla 12 pva kapā mata biye (VBV-Buddha, 3); Ĉaṁt gva gve davaji sakatām 12 jō chāye (VBV-Badri, 3).

40 Om śrīyāye ādiya paicamanamāṁ dvītaṁ ravi ucyate gardhāṣṭi nāma āṣṭāja ca karturāv vinduleva ca paicama savita [4] nāma śaṭama divākaroṁ dharmāya saptaṁ nāma āṣṭame jana tathā nava me bhāskaro vidyān dasame sargāraṁ trītyā ca ekādaśe nāma dvādaśe śrīya devatā maṁ nāmaṁna pud[m?];vimapadā dvādaśa udbhate mokṣāmaṁ raksamāṁ sūrya devatā, iti dvādaśa sūrya devatā stotra sampāta (VBV-Buddha, 3–4).

41 Śvaḥbhāya sarvaṅgātreṇa. śvarupa āṣṭayate prabhā. roga śvaḥbhāgāyaśca. duṣa puṇaṁ nivraṇā. prāṇadānākumā ruṇyati. raksamāṁ shti tivaṁ dhanam, kuruvaśāvahedā. vimudpuruṇaśurya nama stute (VB–Gyana, f19).

42 Badriratna has nāga saṁbhava saṁkhaśaṁ paḍya rāga maṇi prabham / saṁprasthavāra maṛudham vajra śūrya namāmyaham // (VBV–Badri, 4), where Buddharatna’s text runs saṁkhaṇidhūnāya svāhā. padmanī dhūnāya svāhā (VBV–Buddha, 4).

43 The verses in VBV–Badri, 4 agree strongly with verses recorded by Phaññārāmatā Vajrācārya as nāgasambhavasamkhaṁ padmapadaṁ maniprabham / saṁprasthavāraṁ stārādaṁ vajrāsraya namāmyaham. See Sarvaṅgārāmatā Vajrācārya, Vajrayāna pādajīviḥ samgraha, A Collection of Buddhist Worshipping Procedure (itiṭṭhī pādajīviḥ mun) (Kathāntāma: Nepāl bauddha samkṛti samrakṣana kendra, NS 1125 [2005]), p. 4. An almost verbatim listing in Phaññārāmatā Vajrācārya (muni), Vajrayāna pādajīviḥ (Kathmandu: Ratna Pithana (piṭaka), NS 1115 [vaiṣāga 10; VS 2052]), p. 2, was pointed out to me by Iain Sinclair.

44 Buddharatna’s version is om namaḥ śrī śrīyāya. nāga saṁbhava saṁkhaśaṁ padmapadaṁ samaprabham, saṁprasthavāra māruṇaṁ vajrāsraya namāmyaham.
The Starry Sky, the Sun God, and the Good Girl

It is evident that Badrīratna’s text is the one of the three that pays the most attention to the invocations of celestial bodies and other cosmologically grouped agents. Not only are its lists the most comprehensive, the celestial bodies are also systematically grouped according to their location in the sky, whether right or south (dakṣine), middle (madhye), west or behind (paścime), or left or north (uttare). The set of lists is found en bloc in the middle of the text and singularly sports an additional list of minor threatening deities also referred to under the term grahas, literally ‘seizers’, i.e. potentially harmful celestial bodies. The list consists of gods (devas), serpent deities (nāgas), anti-gods (asuras), wind gods (maruts), garudas, heavenly musicians (gandharvas), snake demons (mahorāgas), vegetable spirits (yaksas), demons (rākṣasas), unqualified dead (pretas), hungry ghosts (piśācas), spirits (bhūtas),

45 Iain Sinclair makes this important observation: ‘This is a praise of the Tantric Buddhist ṅāka Vajrāstya, who has the same rank and nature as Heruka. This figure belongs to pan-Sanskritic tradition, though I would guess this particular instantiation of the worship of Vajrāstya is a Newar innovation’. Personal communication, 2012.
47 Thanaṃī macā tayetaḥ nhāyakam sinhamāḥ lalāḥnā jona kā sthāna ināye gaṇesā yāke pūjā chaye (ʻBV-Badri, 4); Thana gaṇesā chaye (ʻBV-Buddha, 5); Ṣhivasvinaṃana janaṅka tāna kāla. kumupinta caye (ʻBV-Gyana, 20).
48 The question as to whether particularly demonic or semi-demonic creatures are referred to in the singular or in the plural (are we talking about individuals or groups or categories as grahas?) is an open one and may be resolved by assuming a reference to both category and individual. The reference to beings of this kind seems to oscillate historically between the singular and the plural with a historical tendency for most of them, if they were not plural from the outset, to move from the former to the latter. See E. Haas, ‘Die Heirathsgebräuche der alten Indernach den Ghryasttira’, in Indische Studien, Vol. 5 (1862), p. 145, on the case of Gandharva, the gandharva and gandharvas.
49 In its list of grahas, the Mahābhārata’s Āryanyakaparvan features child- and embryo-stealing gandharva- and apsara-grahas (MBh, 3.219.36–37).
‘pot-testicled’ demons (kumbhāṇḍas), child-illness-inducing female demons (pītanas),50 (a) child-illness-inducing male demon/s (skanda/s; here spelt skanda),51 demons causing mental illness (unmādas), demons inducing nightmares (chāyās), demons inducing epilepsy (apasmāras), demons possibly somehow distinguished by their (relationship with) lips (?) (oṣṭārakas, uṣṭārakas or oṣṭārakas)52, terrible demons (repanas), stone-hurling demons (ucchritas)53 and ends with a catch-all reference to all grahas.54 In this list, we particularly find the dark forces that are especially adept at causing problems for women, children and, more specifically, girl children, addressed and harnessed. The occurrence of Skanda, in his pairing with his female counterpart, Putanā, and his retinue of harmful creatures is a particularly striking one.55 Skanda appears here not as Śīva’s prince-like bachelor warrior-son known from Purānic mythology, but as the demonic deity closer to the likes of Śītalā or Hārītī, goddesses of smallpox and killers or, where they adopt a benign attitude, protectors of children. The Canadian Indologist, Richard Mann, has recently thrown some light on this dark and powerful pre-history of the status of Skanda as a Purānic high-god and his early affiliation with deities of a very different and dangerous kind.56 This plays, I believe, an important role in the other big Newar girl childhood ritual, the marriage to the bilva fruit, which features Suvarṇakumāra, another name for Skanda, who, according to the prevalent Newar reading, is made to marry the householder’s daughter.57

Moving away from this deity in this one list to the overall arrangement of invocations, it is clear that Badiriratna, or rather the textual tradition he stands in, does not have just individual influences and the prioritising worship of particular celestial deities on his mind. His vision is total as it cosmographically encompasses the entire world of humans in general and focuses on the girl child in particular as caught in the web of potential constellations. She is placed in the cross-hairs of demonic forces bearing down from the sky and from the spaces between and below. It is almost as if the interest in covering the entirety of whatever may be defined as graha and reproducing the world in its graha-character aims at a summoning-like practice similar in its totality to ritually producing a world of ambiguous powerful forces. This is close

50 For an excellent sketch of the grahas, Pītana and Sītāpītana, see Richard D. Mann, The Rise of Mahāsena. The Transformation of Skanda-Kārttikeya in North India from the Kuṣāṇa to Gupta Empires (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 2011), p. 27; see also n. 60.
51 The use of grahas in the singular for individuals or in the plural for categories may be inconsistent here. The Mahābhārata’s Āranyakaparvan knows of skandagrahas (skandagrahāḥ (MBh, 3.219.42)), but the Suṉrutasamhitā, to which I would assume these manuals have a closer affinity, only know of one Skandagраha. See Mann, The Rise of Mahāsena, pp. 73–5.
53 In Skandaprāṇa (1:2:30:37–60), Ucchritī features (together with Aṭiśrīga) as a stone-hurling being in the retinue of Skanda gifted to him on his appointment as commander-in-chief.
54 For this list and for the others, cp. lists included in the Sītāpatra-usṣāna-dhāraṇī (Taishō, 944, 976 and 977) of the Śurangamastotra. There even this less common and standardised list appears in a version very close to Badhirātana’s. On these lists of child-threatening demons in Chinese Buddhist literature, see Michel Strickman (ed. Bernhard Faure), Chinese Magical Medicine (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), p. 220.
55 See MBh, 3.14387ff.; Suṉrutasamhitā, 2.385.2 and 394.9.15. Cp also the occurrence of the (t) S/skanda(s) in comparable lists of ‘bad beings’ such as in the Maṇjuśrīmaṇḍalpa: maṇsūramaṇusūya ca ye cānye duṣṭasattvacetasā / rākṣasostārakā preta skandāpasmāragnahyakā //, Maṇjuśrīmaṇḍalpalpa 36.58 (= ‘53’).
56 Mann, The Rise of Mahāsena.
57 For an extensive analysis of this complex and the importance of the Skanda cult for iḥi, see my forthcoming monograph.
to what the meditating worshipper does at the beginning of each Newar Buddhist ritual during
the ‘Worship of the Preceptor’s Circle’ (‘gurumāndalapūjā’), when he or she visualises
the world as a maṇḍala, as an offering, a practice which is more generally an integral part of every
elaborate Newar ritual, except that this entirely beneficial and auspicious world reaches from
the stars right down to the world of serpent deities, ghosts and goblins. Instead, what is
described in the bārhā-related texts must be understood in the context of much more generic
planetary appeasement rituals, the first and foremost of which is the ‘Appeasement of the Nine
Planets’ (‘navagrahasānti’).58

Apart from the less expansive handling of invocational lists, the version transmitted by
Buddharatna covers most of what we find in that transmitted by Badriratna. And yet, with
copiously more verses dedicated to Sṛṣya, the repeated addressing of Sṛṣya as ‘Lord’, ‘bhagavan’
(e.g. VBV-Buddha, 2), the solar insertions in the list of world guardians, and the additional ‘Hymn
of Sṛṣya’s Twelve Names’, the sun god’s presence here is clearly a much more imposing one.
The pervasive recurrence here of the number twelve in reference to liturgical actions creates an
additional connection between the months of the solar year and the eleven-plus-one days of
bārhā. This is one of the few, if not the only, instances in which the textualised part of the ritual
may allude to bārhā as a whole. If we disregard those recorded cases of bārhā in which the
duration of seclusion is shortened, the number twelve echoes the non-textualised idea of bārhā as
a 12-day event. In this rare case, the textualised and the non-textualised agree and are conjoined
in sharing twelve as the number that needs to be ritually formulated.

But even if Badriratna is more interested in the evocation of the larger cosmic map and
Buddharatna in the Sṛṣya-centred dimensions of protection, they still share enough in
structure and verse material to indicate that the lines of transmission of their texts cannot be
very far apart. Their commonalities set them apart from Gyanaratna’s version of the same
ritual, which seems to come from somewhere else entirely. At the same point in the liturgy
where Buddhharatna is concerned with the implements and Laksāmi, and where Badriratna
mentions the rite of the ‘Five Products of the Cow’ (‘paṅcagavya’), Gyanaratna (VB-Gyana,
13–8), as noted earlier, takes up that rite to add an unusual feature to his text and to the genre
in general: a dialogue. It takes place between someone alternatively called ‘girl child’
(‘bālakini’, a standard address of the girl child in Newar ritual manuals) or ‘girl student’
(‘sisya’, otherwise spelt śisyā), referring in all likelihood to the bārhā girl, and a person
addressed as ‘teacher’ (‘guru’), ‘lord’ (‘nātha’) and ‘supreme god’ (‘paramyasvāra’), otherwise spelt paramesvāra, presumably the priest. The girl child approaches the guru with
the words ‘[O teacher, O lord, O supreme god], gladly please give to me what is called
“paṅcagavya”’ (‘chalapolasyaṃ, jīta paṃcagavya dhāyāgū, prasamṇa jusya [biya] bījyāya[ ]
māla’), explaining that it is for the purpose [or for the meaning of the release from all sins’
(‘sampurṇa pāpa[ ]phukeyā kārane, arthanām’), ‘of worshipping the gods, the chosen and
the auspicious ones’ (‘devata, īstadevata, svastidevata puṇjāyā arthanām’) and ‘for the
purpose of cleansing’ (‘suci yāya nimitiitī’). She then goes into some curious detail to convey
what that ‘evil’ may consist of, explaining that it is about ‘giving trouble to mother and father,
peeing and shitting, sucking milk’ (‘māma babutā duṣa bīgyau, khipānā copānā, durutoṇāgū’). The girl child is clearly referring more to the challenges an infant and toddler
poses to her carers, rather than to those a prepubescent girl would. The text then inserts what
looks like a rather corrupt verse, probably to be recited by the girl child, possibly saying: ‘So
for the purpose of clean speech and thought (read: vākcittasādhanaṅtham), for the sake of

58 For a detailed study of this ritual complex, see Marianna Kropf, ‘Rituellle Traditionen der Planetengottheiten
(Navagraha) im Kathmandutal. Strukturen – Praktiken – Weltbilder’, PhD dissertation, University of
Heidelberg, 2005. For its position within Newar Buddhist ritual, see particularly pp. 250–5, and for comments
on the role of planetary appeasement rituals specifically in bārhā, see pp. 259–60.
thoroughly cleansing [one] of (i.e. avoiding) bad rebirths (read: durgatiparipāśodhanāyā, O lord of great compassion, give me pañcagavya’ (‘atha vākacirita, sudhāthātham, durgarti pariśodhanāyā, māhākārurikānātham, dehi mya pañcagrayaṃ /’ (VB-Gyana, f5)).

In fact, the girl child, or rather the girl child as the ritual person she is made to enact in this liturgy, continues by taking up the verse and explaining what she means by ‘meaning’, additionally showing off her learning by giving a synonym or the Newar equivalent of the Sanskrit terms for the terminological triad of body, speech and thought. “Kāya” [body] means “body” [śarīra, perhaps in the sense of bodily relic; here: sanīra], “vākā” [here: vāk] means “mouth” [muhuta], “citta” [thought; here: cīrtha] means “heart” [nuhghala] (‘kāya[~]dhāyāgū saṇīra vāk<~>dhāyāgū muhuta cīrtha[~]dhāyāgū nughala’), she is made to say. Her eschatological awareness makes her add that she needs to be cleansed else she may ‘incur another adverse destiny’ (‘hanam durggati jone’). Her request to receive pañcagavya comes like a refrain to a song-like incantation, as does another verse that ends with the very same ingredients may also be taken (See Kane, History of Dharma, Vol. 2, part 2, pp. 773–5. For more details, including a reference to an alternative association of the five substances with Aśya sajināṃ bhūtāḥ ḥ sarvaḥ dhātuvyaśakam dhamaḥkārurikā namaḥ ḥ dehimya pañcagrayaṃ (VB-Gyana, f7).

60 One should note that the grhyāstāras (for example, Parāśarasṛṭi, 11.3 and 27) allow for the dispensation of pañcagavya to sādāras and women, but without the employment of verses from the sanhiśās; a manual called the Śāstrālakāra adds the further restriction that these groups can only use them for expiatory rituals (prāyaścita). See Kane, History of Dharmāstātra, Vol. 2, part 2, p. 774.

61 He balakini namādha dhyāyayā nīlavarna nirādhiyāmaya svacyaṣc. bhadra dhyāyayā tvi mha saṁgha ghela. jaṭādhā yāṁḥ māhāṣamaḥ saṁgha saṁgha, saṁgha dhyāyayā hyaṃumhāṣaḥ yā dha. kāpi lā dhāyayām vaṁmahāṣya dha.ura.

62 The Parāśarasṛṭi, in its treatment of the pañcagavya, lists the cows as expected to be dark, white, copperred, red dark and brown, with brown (kapīlā) being the most auspicious type of cow, from which all the ingredients may also be taken (go mātrām gomayaṃ kṣiṭraṃ daddhi sarpiḥ kṣaṣ udakam / nirīṣaṃ pañca gavyaṃ tu paviṃraṃ pāpa śodhanam // go mātrāṃ kṣṛṣaṃ varṇiyāḥ śvetasā caiva gomayaṃ / pavaś ca tāmra varṇiyāḥ rākṣaṃ grahyate daddhi // kapilāḥ gṛhtraṃ grahyatām sarpan sampan kāpi layam eva va //, PS, 11.28–30ab; cp. also the Garudaparāṇa, GP 1.222.63–66. Another tradition associates the five substances with Ađitya, Vāyu, Soma, Agni and Gandharva, who are invoked during the sthāpana rite. For more details, including a reference to an alternative association of the five substances with Ađitya, Vāyu, Soma, Agni and Gandharva, who are invoked during the sthāpana rite, see Kane, History of Dharmāstātra, Vol. 2, part 2, pp. 773–5.
Gyanaratna’s dialogue does several things. Most strikingly, it gives the girl child a presence the other two manuals, in spite of their references to the vādhā girl child, hardly allow for: it turns her not only into a ritual agent, but into someone who initiates the process, demanding her own purification. She is depicted not only as a child or girl child (maka, bālakini), but also as a girl student (śisyā). This role is also elaborated by her making demands, and by making them persistently. She is shown to demonstrate the stage of her learning as somebody who can translate from Sanskrit to Newar, who knows verses, and the ones which fit the purpose at that. She knows and is concerned with her own soteriological–eschatological future. She is also a ‘bad girl’, yet one who is aware of the fact that she is giving her father and mother a difficult time and is willing to make up for that. The ritual exchange is staged literally as one that is primarily pedagogical, cognitive, linguistic and doctrinal: the girl obtains the Five Cow Products by asking for their Sanskrit names, and these being revealed to her. These names, given mostly in Newar, refer to colours and are connected to the materials, the names for which are also given in Newar. The girl child’s body is purified through her knowledge of the names, the Sanskrit–Newar translation and the link established with the materials she is being treated with in the liturgy. This leads us to the final accomplishment of this passage: the movement from word to body and the reference to the girl child’s physical transformation. When, finally, the guru points out that his intervention has cleansed her body (sarila/sudha jula), this connects with the girl child’s translation of speech and thought into their more corporeal Newar equivalents, that is to her sinful dietary practices from refusing to drink what she ought and consuming what she ought not. The latter instance may be a reference to a controlled diet as part of votive practices, reminding us of the term ‘prāyaścitta’ or ‘expiatory ritual’ used at the beginning of this manuscript as well as the use of the term ‘vow’ (‘brata’, usually vrata) by the other two manuals. By introducing the girl child, her body and her practices into the manual, it also opens the processual horizon towards what this ritual instant is also part of: a vow that extends back to the condition that makes this intervention necessary and hints at the previous votive activities the girl child has been engaged in during the lead-up to her interaction with the teacher: in other words, the text is again reaching beyond the limits of textualisation.

What is at least as striking is what this dialogue is not about: menstruation. The issues the girl child is made to raise range (no pun intended) from the scatological to the eschatological. There is no mention of the polluting powers of menstrual blood the grhyasūtras are so concerned with, or of a dramatisation of possible anxieties surrounding menarche. Rather, the girl child, though ritually and doctrinally precocious, is given a thoroughly a- or pre-sexual persona. With such a depiction, the author may have had in mind the girl children he as a priest would be familiar with from the events his manual relates to, or the way he imagines them. In fact, not only do menstrual blood and female sexuality not figure here, but women such as the mother, aunts or the grandmother, who would be the main protagonists in the girl child’s life as well as on the ritual scene, are also missing and are replaced by the male teacher as the gendered agent of textualisation. The text helps establish a male domain that is clearly separated from the female one, be it child-rearing or managing the events of this day and those preceding it. It is a male domain that keeps women at the fringes of the text, but includes the sexually underdetermined girl child as somebody who asks to be included in the textually organised ritual for the sake of her religious improvement involving health, safety and auspiciousness.

The dialogue, within the space that it carves out for itself in the manual, as if it is a play within a play, develops further, comments upon and transforms from within (yet only up to the limits of its framing) the ritual as a whole. It supplies a re-casting, a commentary or a reading, not as a re-telling of a historical event, not as a traditional commentary, not as an ethnographic analysis, but as part of the ritual script itself. It thereby draws on literary forms of the ritual manual genre that traditionally include among its possible literary forms a ritually
choreographed exchange between its agents. The traditional Newar wedding dialogue between the father of the bride and her father-in-law is such an example, as is the dialogue between the preceptor (upādhyāya) and the novice (bare) undergoing ordination (bare chuyegu). The two fathers’ conversation, to put it briefly and to contrast it with our example, is about reassuring the bride’s father that his daughter will be treated well in her new family.63 The concluding exchange between teacher and novice, i.e. the ordination dialogue, is about releasing the boy from his monastic obligation and re-formulating it in terms of a ritual commitment to householder status along the lines of the bodhisattva vow.64 In the sense that the dialogue enacts the student–teacher relationship, and in the transformation the student undergoes at the hands of his preceptor, it comes closest to the exceptional instance of this bārha dialogue. Gyanaratna told me that the dialogue in his manual was an innovation introduced by his father, who liked to tell stories.65 Indeed, in my review of vādhā and ihi manuals throughout their history, I have not encountered any other text within the two genres from which such a trope could be derived. Because, as in all authoritative Buddhist ritual texts, this instance is created and introduced by a Buddhist priest, the most likely point of inspiration or model would be the ordination manual.

However, independent of the extreme example of Gyanaratna’s dialogue, the strongly diverging structure and verse body of Gyanaratna’s text indicates its affiliation to a line of transmission that is very different from that of Badriratna and Buddharatna, who showed at least some overlap. Further, the dramatic divergences in the verse material even between Badriratna and Buddharatna indicate that vādhā byamke manuals seem to generally exhibit a much weaker cohesion in terms of genre than other manuals such as, for example, those dealing with the marriage to the bilva fruit, where large parts of the liturgy are widely shared and reach far back in time.66 It speaks of a historically much more poorly-developed trend towards exchanging, taking over, imitating and generally standardising individual traditions and creating dominant normative models.

To return to the absence of any explicit reference to menstruation in Gyanaratna’s text, the feature that all three texts share is that none of them seems to elaborate upon the obvious hints and markers relating to menstruation or the female body. Gyanaratna’s text alludes to menstruation in its terminology, referring to ‘an expiatory rite [dealing with] the uterine (garbhā) blood (hi)’ (‘garbha hi ātvaścitta’) in the caption to the opening diagram, Buddharatna’s text uses the term the ‘Vow of Sūrya (or Sūrya?) to Free from the Evil of Menstruation’ (‘pūspaḥata pāpamocana sūryāvratā’), and Badriratna’s text talks of ‘Vow Relating to Menstruation’ (‘raja svalā brata’). What Buddharatna and Gyanaratna share is their preoccupation with the expurgation of something bad (pāpa). With Gyanaratna, that something has to be defined, at least in terms of his text, by bringing together the ‘uterine blood’, which the text claims to deal with, and cleansing a girl child from whatever evil her naughtiness may have accrued, without even mentioning that this could be about her menstrual flow. In the case of a premenstrual child, it seems obvious that one should ask: ‘whence such flow?’ One may of course read the text in such a way as to take the dialogue and its focus on pañcagavyā as an

65 Personal communication from Gyanaratna Bajracharya, 2007.
66 For a detailed historical overview of ihi and vādhā manuals, see my aforementioned forthcoming monograph.
exoteric, conventional (vyavahārika) explanation directed at a minor, which hides the more technical aspect of ‘actually’ and ritually working on her womb. But there is not much to indicate that, and the author himself says nothing to back that assumption. What is clear, however, is that the effort aims at a better rebirth, implying that there may be something about this evil and its cleansing that has indeed larger implications for the girl child’s life on the whole. It is an intervention that, just like any regular samskāra, becomes necessary at a specific point in the girl child’s ritual diversification for her to proceed well in this life and beyond. Buddharatna too seems to be intent on taking care of the potentially negative results of monthly bleeding more specifically. If that is the intention of the text, then its focus on Śṛṣṭya indicates that it is the worship of this deity that brings about the desired wholesome result. Badriratna’s text, as we have seen, lifts and disperses its devotional focus on to the cosmological range to include the seriously threatening forces. Here, it is not primarily, representatively and authoritatively Śṛṣṭya, but the celestial and sub-celestial cosmos in its entirety that is summoned to take care of the menstrual flow. To be clear, Buddharatna and Badriratna are by no means in disagreement on this. In fact, worshipping, appeasing and harnessing the beneficial power of Śṛṣṭya (in the sense of Vajraśṛṣṭya) as the foremost of the celestial forces mentioned, implies addressing him because he controls all these other powers and they are then, by implication, controlled as well. Yet, that makes the immediate connection even more rarefied and less specific as to what is being processed, removed, upgraded, safeguarded or influenced. However, just as in Gyanaratna’s reference to the girl child’s future births, and even regarding the pre-eminence of Śṛṣṭya, the implications of what happens here are in a very specific sense about things larger than a momentary lapse or challenge. This is not just a mishap that has to be mended by referring to a specific constellation or appeasing a specific power. There is something much more radical and comprehensive about this intervention, which requires the presence of all forces in the cosmos or the harnessing of the sun god’s power in all his aspects. This is what makes Buddharatna’s, Badriratna’s and Gyanaratna’s references to the ritually anticipated menstrual period so puzzling: what is it about monthly bleeding or the not-even-yet-spilt menstrual blood that calls for a comprehensive cosmic or samskāric intervention, if not something that should change the girl child’s life forever?

There is no reference in these texts to what the event here may be about: is this some very general purification of the girl child, one centred on her womb, one related to her menstrual period, one relating specifically to menarche or to every recurring period? Further, what should keep us wondering even more is the fact that the texts deal with period and womb, while all the while talking about a premenstrual child (macā). To address this question, it is useful to reformulate it thus: how do we know when in a girl child’s life the ritual that this text refers to is expected to take place?

Conclusion: The Bārhā Manual’s Place in Life

In the introduction to his printed manual, Badriratna gives a partial answer: ‘Hence, the ritual called “garbhādhāna”, the first of the Ten Rites of our life-cycle rituals, is “vādhā tayagu” (“tate jhigu sa[m]skāra yā daśakarme nhāpāmyā karma garbhādhāna dhālasā vādhā tayagu khah” (VBV-Badri, k) (Figure 7). In his overview of Newar life-cycle rituals, Ratnakaji Bajracharya draws the connection between bārhā tayagu (using the colloquial name),

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67 Marianna Kropf highlights the dominant role given to Śṛṣṭya (and, to a lesser degree, Candra) in the Newar Buddhist astrological tradition. Here, he is called the overlord of the granhas (grahaṇipati), turning the other grahas into an anonymous collective. See Kropf, ‘Rituelle Traditionen der Planetengottheiten (Navagraha) im Kathmandutal’, pp. 251, 255. Buddharatna’s text is a good example of this development.
garbhādhāna and the menstruation-related ritual, which he refers to as rajasvala vidhi. The authors do not elaborate on what they mean by garbhādhāna, but the term itself refers to the activity of ‘placing into’ or ‘inserting’ (‘ādhāna’) in reference to the garbha, which in this case is commonly taken as meaning ‘the womb’, but which can also mean, in more specific contexts, ‘the embryo’. In the grhyastūtras, it features as part of a group of terms connected with impregnation. One is the ‘Rite of the Fourth Night’ (‘caturthikarman’; also known as the ‘vow’ of the same night, caturthi/vrata), referring to the first intercourse of a married couple. This can be synonymous, particularly in the grhyastūtras of the Vaikhānasas, with a ritual called ‘Pouring’ (‘nīṣeka’, viz. of the semen). Finally, we find a ritual called, in a rather self-explanatory manner, ‘intercourse during the fertile period’ (‘rtusamgamana’). Rather than narrowing our understanding of barhā, this additional dimension serves to broaden the range of activities it may refer to; in fact, now, the vādhā girl is not only supposed to menstruate, but may be, at least as implied by the manual, expected to conceive. Depending on the reading, garbhādhāna as understood in the grhyastūtras in fact involves three potential ritual agents: the wife; the husband; and the child it is meant to produce. In the history of this ritual, particularly in the commentarial literature connected to the grhyastūtras, this multipolarity and potential ambivalence has given rise to some debate concerning the place of the ritual in the ritual lives of those involved. In fact, garbhādhāna may be understood as something bride and groom, or husband and wife, engage in just after their wedding, or regularly over the course of their marital life. In that sense, it may be a ritual that is performed either connected to the events surrounding the wedding or whenever the couple ritually implements their plans for progeny. In any case, it would be a ritual that centres on the woman as the person whose body is meant to be ritually prepared for the successful conception of a child. On the other hand, inasmuch as it is the ritual through which the child emerges and takes shape, it is also and most often taken as the first ritual a human being is affected by in his or her ritual career, thus as the very first in a series of life-cycle rituals or samskarās undergone by the couple’s child, making the child the ritual agent who thereby achieves ritual perfection. This is the place usually attributed to garbhādhāna in texts that deal with a normative set of ten rituals, the Ten Rites, or daśakarma, a set particularly popular in Nepal and among the Newars, but with a much longer and wider South Asian history. The set is most

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68 Garbhādhāna vāye ou sakṣama jula dhāya samketa kuḥ. thayu sthitīyāta dhīnāyā tayā bhingu sātīyā lakāh barhā tayu yā jāvai. thukīyāta he rajasvala vidhi dhākāh nam dhaṃya nām du (Ratnakāti Vajracārya, Nevāh samskarā sanskritiyā jātāḥ (Yeā: Vajracārya prakāśā, 1124 NS dillāthva punhi; 2061 VS sāla asāra 18 gate gurupunhi [2 July 2004]), p. 4.

69 This semantic ambiguity goes back to the translation proposals of the key garbhādhāna verse, RV, 9,83,3cd, Mayavīno mamire asya maṇīya nṛcākṣasaḥ pitaro gārbham ā dadhuh //, rendered by Geldner as ‘Die Zauberkundigen haben durch seine Zauberkraft die Masse (der Welten) gemacht, die Väter mit dem Herrenauge haben den Keim gelegt’ (RV-tr. Ge, III, 76). Here, Geldner gives garbha as ‘the germ’, but it could also be ‘into the womb’ with the accusative of direction (cp. Cornelia Haas, Wie man den Veda lesen kann - Gandharva und dem Kommentar des Sa, 1124 NS dillāthva punhi; 2061 VS sāla asāra 18 gate gurupunhi [2 July 2004]), p. 4. In the later grhyasūtra literature, the meaning of adhāna seems to be extended to ‘causing, effecting’, but, as the commentarial discussions there show, it remains ambiguous on which side the ‘effecting’ takes place, on that of the mother and her womb or on that of the embryo emerging out of the mother’s uterine blood in conjunction with the father’s semen.

often connected to the consecration of images that are subjected to an abbreviated version of life-cycle rituals from garbhādhāna to marriage (vivāha) and, in the case of Newar religion most often, Tantric initiatory rites (abhiseka). The term, however, also refers to what is more generally called samskāras or, in academic anthropological terminology, ‘life cycle’, ‘life crisis rituals’ or ‘rites of passage’, though some rituals in some lists would not meet the criteria for either grhyaśūra or Indological ‘samskāra’, nor for its anthropological counterpart. Being as normative and thus traditionally as gender-, age- and caste-specific as most lists in this context are, it establishes the kind of rituals an individual is expected to undergo during his or her ritual career, as well as their chronological order relative to the individual’s life. In a more specific ritualistic sense, it also establishes which rituals qualify as samskāras and which do not. For their authority these lists go back, in the case of rituals aimed at humans, to domestic ritual manuals celebrating crucial events in a family member’s life and, in the case of rituals aimed at religious artefacts, to consecration manuals, the latter possibly being based historically on manuals dealing with the consecration of Agni during the fire sacrifice. It is crucial to note that garbhādhāna, as with thread consecration (upanayana) and marriage (vivāha), is a core element of these lists and, together with the ritual called ‘womb-cleansing’ (yonisamśodhana), may be the first in the series of samskāras. The marriage to the bilva fruit (ihi), to mention a contrasting example, does not feature in Newar samskāra lists, at least not if one regards it as a ‘life-cycle ritual’ separate from marriage. This is an important fact, as one may ask how these lists deal with bārhā. And it is thus via the vādhā byāmkta manuals that bārhā comes to be connected with garbhādhāna.

Moving away from trying to find the place of bārhā in a girl child’s life, the way Michael Allen had attempted, I have instead sought to find its place within the ritual literature familiar to those who themselves contribute towards ritually creating this place. Further, I have attempted to localise bārhā through its texts by placing it within the larger framework of the multiple domestic consecrations that constitute a ritual biography. What we have seen is that the trajectory of writing bārhā texts moves in two directions: that of making sense of inherited material and continuing to write them, and maintaining their consistency; and that of aiming to connect with what goes on around the text, extending its limited textualising impact upon the ritual scene. On the one hand, the authors have been handed down and try to re-write templates ritually dealing with the female period, menstrual impurity, conception and the concerted removal of forces that may threaten both mother and embryo. On the other hand, when the authors try to reach out to the girl children, their ritual texts have historically ended up being devoted to, and intended to connect with, whatever their mothers, aunts and grandmothers may have been doing with the emerging little women placed in their ritual care. This article is not the place to explain the puzzle of how texts and contexts ended up together. I have attempted to do that elsewhere. Instead, what it has tried to show is that the authors of ritual manuals may have been struggling to come to terms with Buddhist rituals for Newar girls, both burdened and enabled by their own heritage, just as contemporary anthropologists, such as Michael Allen, may have tried to solve puzzles they share with the very Newar Buddhists they have studied.

72 The most comprehensive comparative discussion of these lists in the Newar context, including a highly useful synopsis, can be found in Gellner, Monk, Householder, and Tantric Priest, pp. 198–200.