

ISSN 0341-5910

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN

SEKTION
ETHNOLOGIE

SERIE 7 · NUMMER 42 · 1977

FILM E 2198



INSTITUT FÜR DEN WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILM · GÖTTINGEN

Film Data:

Silent film, 16 mm, black and white, 101 m, 9¹/₂ min (24 f/s); with asynchronous recording tape (semi-track, 9,5 cm/s). Produced 1968/69, published 1976.

The film is a research document and has been issued for use in research and higher education. The film was shot by Dr. J.G. REINHARD, New Lenox, Ill., Institut für Völkerkunde, Wien. Supported, edited, and published by the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen, Dr. A. M. DAUER; cutting: M. SCHORSCH.

Form of Citation:

REINHARD, J.G.: Raji (Nepal) – Shaman Initiation. Film E 2198 of the IWF, Göttingen 1976. Publication by J.G. REINHARD, Publ. Wiss. Film., Sekt. Ethnol., Ser. 7, No. 42/E 2198 (1977), 9 pp.

Address of the Author of the Publication:

Dr. J.G. REINHARD, 155 Fir Street, New Lenox, Ill. 60451, USA.

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN

Sektion BIOLOGIE

Sektion TECHNISCHE WISSENSCHAFTEN

Sektion MEDIZIN

NATURWISSENSCHAFTEN

Sektion ETHNOLOGIE

Sektion GESCHICHTE - PUBLIZISTIK

Herausgeber: H.-K. GALLE + Schriftleitung: E. BETZ, I. SIMON

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN sind die schriftlichen Ergänzungen zu den Filmen des Instituts für den Wissenschaftlichen Film und der Encyclopaedia Cinematographica. Sie enthalten jeweils eine Einführung in das im Film behandelte Thema und die Begleitumstände des Films sowie eine genaue Beschreibung des Filminhalts. Film und Publikation zusammen stellen die wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichung dar.

PUBLIKATIONEN ZU WISSENSCHAFTLICHEN FILMEN werden in deutscher, englischer oder französischer Sprache herausgegeben. Sie erscheinen als Einzelhefte, die in den fachlichen Sektionen zu Serien von etwa 500 Seiten zusammengefaßt und im Abonnement bezogen werden können. Jede Serie besteht aus 4 Lieferungen mit einer entsprechenden Zahl von Einzelheften; jährlich erscheinen 1–4 Lieferungen in jeder Sektion.

Bestellungen und Anfragen an: Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film
Nonnenstieg 72 · D-3400 Göttingen
Tel. (05 51) 2 10 34

JOHAN G. REINHARD, New Lenox, Ill.:

Film E 2198

Raji (Nepal) – Shaman Initiation

Author of the Publication: JOHAN G. REINHARD

With 3 Figures

Summary of the Film:

Raji (Nepal) – Shaman Initiation. Several scenes of men being possessed and “dancing” about are followed by scenes of men stepping through fire, being held while cuts are made on their bodies, making offerings, “dancing” possessed around a tree, and sacrificing a goat.

Inhalt des Films:

Raji (Nepal) – Schamanen-Initiation. Der Film zeigt zunächst mehrere Aufnahmen von besessenen Männern, die „tanzen“, dann folgen Szenen, in denen Männer durchs Feuer gehen, festgehalten werden und Hautschnitte erhalten, Opfer verrichten, im Zustand der Besessenheit um einen Baum „tanzen“ und eine Ziege opfern.

Résumé du Film:

Raji (Népal) – Cérémonie d'initiation des chamanes. Le film montre d'abord des hommes possédés “dansants”, puis des scènes où des hommes marchent à travers le feu, reçoivent des incisions sur leur corps, remettent des offrandes, “dansent”, possédés, autour d'un arbre et sacrifient une chèvre.

General Preliminary Remarks¹

Small groups of the Tibeto-Burman speaking Raji tribe are found spread throughout West Nepal. Their total population does not exceed 1500, and the population of the Purbia (eastern) Raji, with whom we are concerned here, probably does not number more than 600. They are reknown as boatmen and fishermen, who have now settled and become agriculturalists in various parts of Southwest Nepal.

¹ The research upon which this article is based was supported by grants from the Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research and the Austrian Academy of Sciences. Film material was contributed by the Institut für den Wissenschaftlichen Film, Göttingen.

Forest produce, fish, and to a lesser extent game obtained through hunting, add important supplements to their food supply. Members of hill castes have had contact with the Raji for many years, but only recently have begun to settle year round in the area of main concentration of the Purbia Raji, the Babai River Valley.

The shaman (*gurau*) is the most important religious functionary in Raji society. Brahman priests are not normally employed by the Raji, and the shaman is the key person in most major village rituals, besides being a curer of illnesses. In the Babai Valley roughly half of all the adult married men have participated in shaman initiations, although only a few continued on to become practicing shamans. Many participated in the initiations primarily in order to gain a tutelary deity which would help to protect them and their families. Major reasons for there not being more practicing shamans are difficulties in obtaining the necessary instruction, and in acquiring rights to work in villages, since established shamans are usually reluctant to relinquish such rights.

The power of the shaman lies in the eyes of the Raji in his knowledge of spells (*mantra*). These frequently are spoken in the context of a ritual and accompanying some symbolic action, e.g. blowing on an object. Often the curing of an ill person requires that some offerings be made to the deity, spirit, or witch thought to have caused the illness. Basic offerings consist of strips of cloth, red powder, incense, hulled rice, a lamp, and a liquid of some sort. Numerous other items may be given, e.g. money, models representing animals and/or humans, sacrificial animals, etc., and some offerings may be quite distinctive, as for example blood from some part of a man's body for his tutelary deity or those offerings made for a witch. Occasionally an offering is postponed by making a promise to the deity to make it at a later date. Besides making offerings, the shaman occasionally uses other techniques to cure a patient, e.g. sucking out an intrusive object, giving medicines and amulets, and having the patient change his place of residence.

A shaman who has rights over a village is given grain annually depending upon the wealth of the contributing family. The shaman in turn helps cure ill members of the family free of cost and also performs important functions at village ceremonies, such as those prior to rice planting and at the time of its harvest, to help rid rice fields of insects, and to provide a protective barrier against evil spirits around the village. The shaman does not normally become especially wealthy from his work. However, he does often receive free meals and liquor wherever he stays, and is accorded considerable prestige in the community¹.

Background to the Film

Men who wish to undergo the shaman initiation frequently do so out of a mixture of curiosity and a desire for a tutelary deity and the concomitant power and prestige that this implies. Few know beforehand whether or not they will continue on to become practicing shamans, as it is normally in the initiation that Raji men

¹ For further information and analysis see REINHARD [1] and [2].

first become possessed. Thus the initiation marks the true beginning rather than the completion of learning to become a shaman in earnest.

Although an initiation may take place at any of two times during a year, they occur infrequently. This is primarily due to the expense involved in providing liquor and a goat offering to the deities and participating shamans. Initiations may take place at either of the two *Dasain* festivals which occur in the fall and spring. These festivals are the traditional periods for worshipping the goddess *Durga* and house deities, and it is from these deities that a man's tutelary deity (or deities) will be drawn.



Fig. 1. Initiates sitting with hands before their faces

Normally there are only a few initiates, and the initiation takes place in the home of one of these men. One shaman is sufficient, although normally more are present. The primary function of the shaman is to divine what evil spirits are causing difficulties and to drive them away to call the prospective tutelary deities. If the initiation takes place in a house, the initiates sit near the center post where usually the goddess *Durga* is worshipped. Indeed most initiates acquire *Durga*, or one of her manifestations, *Kalika*, as their tutelary deity. There are no special items utilized for the initiation only, although a special chant and drum beat are employed. The drum (*madal*) is one commonly used at festivities and any man or boy may drum at the initiation.

If a large number of men are to be initiated, the initiation may be conducted at the main village worship place (*than*). The initiates should wash beforehand (although

few bother to), and gather together with shamans and interested male onlookers at the place of initiation after dark. The initiates sit in a circle, caps removed, and make respectful salutations to the deities, i.e. in the direction of a plate containing hulled rice, money, and a lamp meant as offerings to the deities to be called.



Fig. 2. Two initiates "dance" through fire while possessed

The shamans offer liquor to their tutelary deities. While the initiates sit quietly with their hands together before their faces, the shamans begin chanting and the drumming begins. Normally the shamans become possessed first and hop or "dance" about on both feet with their arms hanging loosely at their sides. Shamans still not possessed throw hulled rice on the initiates (or place it on their shoulders) and yell out for the deities to come and possess them. Occasionally men who are possessed will grab hold of an initiate still not possessed and shake him. After about 20 minutes such a session stops for a brief period during which the men rest and discuss the situation. Divination with rice may be done in order to discover

which spirits are keeping some initiates from becoming possessed. Initiates who have become possessed offer liquor to their newly acquired tutelary deities. After a few minutes the possession sessions begin again and continue on and off throughout the night until the sun rises the following morning.

At large initiations a fire may be built and, while possessed, the initiates walk, "dance", and occasionally crawl through it. If truly possessed, the initiates are



Fig. 3. Cuts are made on an initiate by a shaman

said not to feel any pain or become burned. Immediately following this, shamans will hold a possessed initiate and, while a shaman says a spell, fine cuts are made with a piece of parched rice on various parts of the initiate's body (usually his forehead, tongue, both sides of his chest, both thighs, and on the tops of his feet). The parched rice is mixed with other rice and given to the initiate to keep for later occasions when he needs this powerful type of offering. After the cutting is completed and the deity leaves the initiate, he goes off to the side and offers liquor to his tutelary deity. When all the initiates have been cut, the shamans offer liquor to their own deities.

If the initiation takes place at the village worship place, the initiates become possessed one more time and "dance" around a tree at which tutelary deities are collectively worshipped. A red strip of cloth for the deities is tied around the tree previously by the village priest. At each change of tempo in the drumming the initiates change direction. After a few minutes each initiate is given in turn hulled rice which he throws at the tree, following which the deity leaves his body. After

water has been sprinkled on to the head of a goat and it shakes its head, the village priest decapitates it with a large knife at the base of the tree. The goat's body is dragged once around the tree, and water and/or blood is poured over the goat's head and on to a plate containing hulled rice. This is mixed and a small amount is applied to the goat's head, and then applied to the foreheads of all people present. Later the goat is divided among the shamans and initiates and eaten.

Notes on Making of the Film

The film was made on April 14–15, 1970 in the village of Ban Gaun, Sano Sheri Panchayat, Banke District. That the initiation took place at this time (i.e. the *Chait Dasain* festival) was due to the instigation of the ethnographer, who supplied the goat and liquor. The beginning of the initiation took place the night of April 13 and could not be filmed, but did not vary significantly from the filmed portions. Due to difficulty in obtaining a goat, the initiation continued for a few hours during the next two days. It should have been completed the morning of April 14. Not only was a large number of initiates unusual, but also unusual was the possession of a boy, who was not originally an initiate, and the possession of a member of the blacksmith caste, who joined the Raji in the "dance" around the tree. Four practicing shamans were in charge of the initiation, but only one, NAINA LODHIAL, was from the area. Several men who had previously been initiated also assisted. NAINA was not available the final day of the initiation, because he was called away for work in another village.

Technical data: camera: Bell and Howell Model 70-D; lenses: Switar 16 mm, Bausch and Lomb 25 mm, Yvar 75 mm; camera speed: 24 f/s; film material: Kodak Plus X, black and white negative film type 7231.

Description of Film

A general scene of the participants in the initiation and of bystanders is followed by a scene in which men "dance" about while in a state of possession. A shaman throws rice, while a boy plays the drum. Two possessed shamans shake an initiate, and some initiates are shown sitting with their hands held before their faces. Several similar scenes follow showing possession and people sitting during one of the interludes in the possession sessions. Initiates "dance" through a fire. Shamans hold initiates while fine cuts are made in their bodies. After offering liquor to their deities, the initiates "dance" possessed around a tree. Taking rice from a shaman, they throw it at the tree. The goat is sacrificed and the mixed blood and rice is applied to the foreheads of those present.

Bibliography

- [1] REINHARD, J.: Deskriptive Analyse von Schamanismus und Hexerei bei den Purbia Raji Südwest-Nepals. Diss. phil. Wien 1973.
- [2] REINHARD, J.: Shamanism Among the Raji of Southwest Nepal. In: *Spirit Possession in the Nepal Himalayas*, ed. by J. HITCHCOCK and R. JONES. New Delhi 1976.

Filmography

- [3] REINHARD, J.G.: Raji (Nepal) – Divination and Magical Treatment of an Illness. Film E 2197 of the IWF, Göttingen 1976. Publication by J.G. REINHARD, Publ. Wiss. Film., Sekt. Ethnol., Ser. 7, No. 41/E 2197 (1977), 8 pp.
- [4] REINHARD, J.G.: Raji (Nepal) – Shaman Initiation. Film E 2198 of the IWF, Göttingen 1976. Publication by J.G. REINHARD, Publ. Wiss. Film., Sekt. Ethnol., Ser. 7, No. 42/E 2198 (1977), 9 pp.

Sources of the Figures

Fig. 1–3: photography J. G. REINHARD.