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# ADIVASI

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Journal of Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes Research and  
Training Institute (SCSTRTI) Bhubaneswar Orissa India

## EDITORIAL

This volume of *Adivasi* contains ten scientific papers on various themes pertaining to tribal and folk society, their culture, and development.

The paper "Revisiting Tribes and Reconsidering Tribal Development" begins with an assertion that failures of tribal development strategies are the failures of our appreciation of tribes, their cultures and societies. It throws new light on our basic assumptions regarding tribes dispelling some of our misconceptions by way of revisiting tribes. The author critically examines tribal development strategies and pleads for their reconsideration.

The second paper, "The Story of the Fowler: Popular Hindism in South Orissa" elaborately discusses the 'story of the fowler' collected from south Orissa. By stressing the importance of study of village theatre, the author interprets and analyses the story from social anthropological perspectives.

The third paper, "Globalization as an Anthropological Perspective: Some Issues and Debates" brings to light some issues and debates on globalization as a process and examines them with the help of empirical findings from different societies. It also discusses the scope of anthropological study of globalization.

In "Feeding the Dead: Rituals of Transformation among the Gadaba of Koraput," the author focuses his ethnographic study on secondary burial ritual among the Gadaba of Koraput, Orissa, and theoretically deals with death ritual as a transitional phase of rite de passage.

The fifth paper, "Transfer of Children and Inter-group Relations in a mixed Tribal and Caste Society" deals with the phenomenon of symbolic transfer of children in mixed tribal and caste societies for improvement of health conditions, and to help them survive. The author discusses case studies collected from rural Orissa.

"Voices of Gods: Ecstatic Alekhs and Local Configurations of Mahima Dharma" highlights the sub-regional diversity of the religious life and living of Mahima ascetics. The author tries to deal with the field data at a theoretical plane and develop new perspectives on the discourses on Mahima Dharma.

The paper, "Industrialization in a 'tribal zone': The Desia of Koraput and a Hydro-electric Power Plant" brings to surface the interrelations between the system of value ideas of the indigenous population (Desia) and their strategies to adopt to the new situation.

"Changing Annual Hunting Festival, Chaitra Paraba : An Outsider's View" discusses many aspects of the annual hunting festival observed by the denizens of Koraput. The paper deals with the changing perspectives of the ritual practice and constructs an opinion on the changing value system of the people.

In "Healing Practices and Mahima Dharma: A Short Note on Recent Fieldwork in Western Orissa" the author tries to establish the association of healing with the practice of Mahima cult, and discusses the role of Mahima monks in it. He explains the practice of the cult at a functional level.

The author of the paper on "The Munda" describes various aspects of the Munda society and culture, and discusses the impact of change and modernization on them.

It is hoped that these articles will be of immense help not only to academicians, researchers, development practitioners committed to research and development of tribal people but also will serve the purpose general readers.

I shall be failing in my duty if I do not thank the Members of the Editorial Board of the Journal for their moral support. We extend our sincere gratitude to Shri A.K.Samantaray, I.A.S., Principal Secretary, ST & SC Development Department, Government of Orissa, for his support, encouragement and guidance in bringing out this combined issue of the journal.

I sincerely thank the contributors of articles to this volume of the Adivasi. At the same time, I thank the colleagues and staff of the Institute for their ungrudging help and cooperation in bringing out the volume.

**EDITOR**

# Revisiting Tribes and Reconsidering Tribal Development Some Reflections

P.K.Nayak

## Introduction

The author being a trained professional in tribal studies strongly feels that, notwithstanding other shortfalls, tribal development falls short of its desired goal partly but most importantly due to the fact that there is something lacking in our understanding of tribes. Failures of tribal development strategies are the failures of our appreciation of tribes, their cultures and societies. Our understanding of tribes so far has been couched in alien terms. We assume that tribes are 'the other'. The western bias shapes our perceptions to such an extent that we are not prepared to admit there are striking parallels between the Hindu caste India and the tribal India. That tribes and castes form a continuum is hardly translated into action. Rather tribes are looked upon as aliens having queer habits, strange beliefs, mysterious cults and unconventional chores, and therefore deserving differential treatment. We believe as if their development has little do with our development or development of the nation. A critical look at what the tribes are, how they express themselves and perform can help us better in evolving and implementing appropriate development strategies. Therefore, this paper intends to throw new light on our basic assumptions regarding tribes dispelling some of our misconceptions by way of revisiting tribes, and to reconsider tribal development and give it a boost.

In revisiting tribes, firstly attention has been focused on the fact that the term 'tribe' does not refer to a people possessing antiquated characteristics but to people adhering to quite sophisticated standards of social life and living. Tribe for that matter is a concept, which used to express an extraordinary combination of two supposedly conflicting values: individual freedom and social togetherness. On the one hand, each tribal individual exercises his free will and on the other, abides by the social norm prescribed by the society. The degree of independence enjoyed by individual tribesmen makes their social living harmonious. Individual level of interdependence is based on the principle of reciprocity. Obligation relationships are always upheld as the highest value even if one would undergo suffering while adhering to it. The ideal and the actual coexist and co-terminate. Thus it makes 'tribe' a social phenomenon, a social process, a social system which continues over time relatively undisrupted.

Tribal development has remained an enigmatic issue, an unsolved problem. In spite of more than fifty years of efforts, the goals of tribal development have not yet been achieved (Nayak:1999). One may attribute this to several causes. On the one hand, development schemes fall short of the felt needs of the people and on the other, they do not take into consideration what impact they would have on the people, their society and culture. The risks involved are hardly diagnosed and debated. The traditional social institutions and the overall social potential of the people are very casually appropriated and often wrongly appraised and interpreted. Neither the area development approach accommodates within it tribe-specific schemes nor does the

tribe specific approach consider it important to conjoin in any way with area development. Development aid and help to the people are seen as short-run arrangements rather than as a concrete programme to develop the people. Every time it appeared as if development schemes were being in the experimental phase: toying with ideas rather than dealing with the problem of development. The poorest of the poor and the most deprived are hardly covered under the development schemes. Rarely is any social scientific rigor adopted to objectively estimate the extent to which benefits go to the beneficiary families. Beneficiaries of any development scheme are expected to perform well in that scheme but what problems they encounter are not heeded. The development agencies are often ill equipped and the personnel executing the schemes lack the expertise, the vision and proper understanding of the spirit behind the schemes. In the process, the officials deployed in the field act more as managers of distribution of development inputs and their control than 'development administrators' entrusted with certain responsibilities to see people develop.

### **'Tribes' : Towards a Critical Understanding**

The elitist historical understanding of tribes places them as peripheral communities, which had little to do with the mainstream hierarchical caste Hindu culture. In the status hierarchy, the tribes have been considered low. Anthropological ethnographies following the colonial legacy have depicted tribal cultures as secluded, strange and curious: only in some cases having casual connectivity with outer world and the outside society. Thus the construction and projection of tribes as alien societies have haunted the minds of academicians and administrators. Contrarily, that the tribes had a lot to do in shaping of the caste Hindu society and culture has never been brought to light, and that in the historical process they were well connected to dominant centres of power has rarely been considered relevant. Comparison of cultural beliefs and practices of contemporary tribes and castes at a value neutral level, minus the Brahmanical superimposition can clearly demonstrate the parallels between the two, and can point out the gaps in our knowledge of tribes and castes. However, in the socio-political process of incorporation and exclusion, the tribes have been marginalised. This marginalisation has called for the intervention of the State to ameliorate the problems of tribes, to change and develop them with a view to integrating them with the mainstream Indian society. Nevertheless, we have to bear in mind that they (the tribes) have been part of us and we have been part of them, the only difference being we operate at different levels.

In several respects tribes represent our past and our ideal present. In terms of the basic cultural values many rural caste Hindu villages of Orissa (those having less Brahmanical influence) can be compared with the tribal villages. To some degree, the rural-caste Hindus are tribal-like. One would be amazed to know that two-three decades ago there was no beggary, no theft in tribal villages and hardly people told lies. The same was true in rural caste Hindu villages. In some non-coastal areas of Orissa, the tribes and caste Hindus alike value such virtues and continue to maintain such cultural traits. The degree of reciprocity and equanimity among the tribal people and high degree of democratic decision making in tribal societies are priceless possessions. In the modern society today, for all its technical elaborations, these values seem unattainable.

Tribes live in hills and forests. This does that mean, as some argue, they have been pushed to the forest by force and marginalised and therefore lead a life of "jungle dwelling" having lesser mental capacity and degraded cultural values. On the contrary, hill and forest dwelling is an adaptation preferred by the tribesmen, for they are lovers of nature and attach a high value to living close to nature, parsimoniously appropriating the natural and biotic environment. For them, the quality of life rests in independent management of life and living within the limits of natural resources and maintaining a cultural identity with pride and dignity.

Although all tribes are characterized by possessing elementary social structures, each individual tribe has its own mechanical mode. Each has its diacritical features different from the other. In certain cases, an individual tribe may be seen as a clear-cut variation on the other. For example, in Orissa, the Dongria Kondh, Kutia Kondh, Malia Kondh, Pengo Kondh etc. are variations of the Kondh tribe. At the elementary level, these tribes organize themselves in different descent groups, known as clan groups, which guide their day to day socio-cultural and politico-economic life and living. Clan organization, clan groups and clan settlements are fundamental to conceptualizing the Kondh tribe and its variations. Clanship is one of the basic determinants of the Kondh tribal identity. Other tribes may have clans or clan-like structures, but the Kondh clanship is unique. In the same way, the varieties of tribes and their variations can be conceptualized on the basis of some of their respective fundamental attributes. Thus 'tribes' have to be seen comparatively in their plural forms, and their cultures have to be seen as 'adaptive strategies', 'need serving devices', and 'well founded designs'.

People in tribal societies maintain subsistence living. Tree produce and forest produce adds to their subsistence economy. Contingent surplus is used for tiding over scarcity. At the time of need, kinsmen come to their rescue; whenever required, they borrow from kinsmen, and remain tied to each other through kinship bond. Exchange of labour among them speaks of their mutual interdependence at the individual or group level. Exploitation of one tribal man by another is hardly conceivable. Interestingly, dependence on outsiders in any form is discouraged and often repudiated in close knit tribal societies.

Tribes are poor but not dependent. They are self-sufficient, and they function as self-contained units. What pinches them is deprivation, not poverty. Their land and territory, forest and fauna, and built-in social potential are always under threat from usurpers from outside, be it the Hindu caste neighbours, moneylenders, contractors, rapacious officials, development agencies etc. Government plans and policies have not been tailored to their primary needs, that is, their rights over their natural resources, and support and protection of their socio-cultural practices.

To decide how to go about tribes empirically before we pronounce development measures for them an appraisal of tribal Orissa may be worthwhile here. The tribes in Orissa today can be conceptually categorized into three broad ethno-social groups: the close knit tribes and tribal groups including the 'primitive tribal groups' living in dominant uni-ethnic settlements, the tribes living in multi-ethnic tribal/rural settings, and the urban, industrial and mines dwelling migrant tribal labourers. In spite of incursions of modernity and development interventions, the first category of tribes and tribal groups continue to maintain their autonomy and have retained their



traditional institutions and cultural standards to an appreciable degree. They are the indigenous varieties and who claim 'sons of the soil' status. They can be conceptualized as the 'ideal types'. The second category of tribes have changed their life-style a great deal in constant interaction with the dominant caste Hindu neighbours and who more or less behave like peasant castes. In the historical process, they have been partially integrated with the wider Hindu society and follow the latter's rule of law. At the same time they have retained their singular identity in a multi-ethnic context. This category of tribes therefore has been susceptible to land alienation, exploitation and bonded labour. The third category of tribes mostly shuttle between their native village and alien town and city and earn money wages. They appropriate the best of both the worlds. One can conceive of the fourth category of tribal men and women having white-collar jobs. Economically they are much better off but they face identity crisis. They are neither acceptable to the hierarchical Hindu structure nor they are any more contented with their traditional social structure and cultural value.

We entertain all sorts of misconceptions about tribes, their social institutions, cultural practices and even about their women. Some of these misconceptions are noted below and explained.

- **Tribes are half-clad and their women are half-naked.** But one should not forget that however scantily clad they are, their dresses are culturally prescribed. The *ringa*, the colourful head dresses, the bunch of long necklaces of jungle beads and varieties of ornaments worn by the Bonda women, the Dongria Kondh *drilli*, the Lanjia Saora long-tailed loin cloth are considered dignified dresses by the respective people. If you say they are naked, they rebuff you saying that we are naked, for we men do not use neck-bands, ear rings, nose rings etc. This is the way high caste Hindu ladies would castigate the ladies of the western world, for their necks and hands are naked. If we feel proud and dignified in our own way, why cannot the tribesmen and women feel the same in their. As we have our cultural needs they have theirs too. Then, why should we assume that they are naked and therefore they need be clothed in our way. In the developed countries of the west, men and women in large numbers tan in the sun half-naked to fully naked in the parks, riverbanks and seashores. In these cold countries people feel the necessity of exposing their entire skin to the sun. It is rational and there is scientific reason behind it. By the same token, if a Bonda woman wears a one-and-half feet *ringa* and covers her bosoms and private parts with bead necklaces why should immodesty be imputed to her? It has nothing to do with poverty either. For them small is beautiful and bountiful.
- **Tribes are unclean and do not have hygienic practices.** Although they do not use modern detergents, soaps and cosmetics, they meticulously attend to their bodily cleanliness and cleanliness of hearth and home and personal belongings. Their food preparation is healthy and hygienic, mostly boiled, baked and smoked. They keep the village streets and settlements neat and clean and unlike some caste Hindu villagers and urbanites never defecate on the footpaths. They strictly follow early morning habits and remain physically fit to undertake any arduous work. To their advantage, the natural surrounding provides them nourishment. Diseases are believed to be

invasions from outside and therefore warded off by shamans. Above all, the level of their moral order and community discipline had its positive influence on individual and community health. One cannot but regret the gradual erosion of community discipline and deterioration of traditionally valued cleanliness standards. Individually they are picking up these habits from us. It is difficult to convince our fellow caste Hindus that they are less unclean than we ourselves are.

- **Tribals are mostly led by blind beliefs and believe in occultism.** Whatever beliefs and practices the tribals have are believed by many of us to be founded on blind beliefs and wrong assumptions. As if we do not have blind beliefs, only tribals have! In our estimate, the day to day economic life, social relationships, decision-making processes and rituals and festivals of tribals seem loosely structured since they emanate from blind beliefs. Many would never imagine that in tribal societies the social, economic, political, religious relationships are very much institutionalized. It is very difficult to convince some of our people that they have labour cooperatives and that they do not live in a world of blind beliefs, sorcery and witchcraft. The truth is, we still continue to have these blind beliefs against them. It is quite notable that many of us who are modern and educated, when we fail in our mission after exploring all possibilities, do not mind taking recourse to practices which are often shamanic. The burgeoning Baba cults in towns and cities of India are clearly indicative of this ultra-shamanism. In point of fact, the tribesmen not only have strong faith in witchcraft and shamanism but also are at the same time very practical and pragmatic about these.
- **Men and women in tribal societies do not regulate their sex.** One is mistaken if one thinks that men and women in tribal societies mate at random and marry within, without following any rules of exogamy; one's wife today may be somebody else's tomorrow; they purchase women and in the process acquire multiple wives. The fact is, they know sex early but at the same time know with whom they can have sex and with whom, not. They strictly adhere to the exogamous principle prescribed by society. A man of good social status used to have more than one wife but always with the consent of the first wife. In this respect they are open and rational. That they purchase wives is a misconception. Marriage payments are made to the kinsmen of the bride and the village community. Social sharing is more prized than the mode of individual acquisitions that we encounter in the dowry practices of the caste Hindus.
- **Tribes are denounced as beefeaters and drunkards.** The dominant-Hindu society attach negative values to beef-taking and alcoholic drinks. The tribals observe rituals, sacrifice buffaloes and cows to the deities and take the meat as ceremonial food the same way the Hindus take non-vegetarian *prasad* in the goddess temples. Many modern Indians take pleasure in alcoholic drinks. But they are not regarded as drunkards. It is strange that when tribals drink their own produce they are described as drunkards and it is assumed that drunkenness stands as a barrier to their development. It may be said that everybody in tribal society drinks but everybody is not a drunkard. The Dongria Kondh term for a person who habitually takes alcoholic drinks in

excess is *bongari*. So the misconception that they squander away money on drinks and drugs and torture their women needs to be reviewed. May be it is partly true among the money earning tribes and their neighbours. Generally speaking, women in tribal societies command a lot of respect.

- **The tribesmen capture brides and elope with women.** What is very much prized in tribal societies is the respect for their women. Marriage by negotiation is the dominant mode. In the negotiation process capture and elopement, are positive phases. Capture is a symbolic etiquette, which brings honour to the bride, and elopement testifies to regulated free will, mutual consent and love. Ethnographic descriptions have adopted a biased view of capture and elopement, which needs to be amended. We should learn not to see these as lowly marriage practices.
- **Tribes are poor and therefore have poor quality of life.** This assertion is totally wrong. Given everything within its limits, the tribesmen value the quality of life. The cereals, pulses, vegetables and fruits they cook as food and the way they prepare it at home and serve it is qualitatively superior to what we eat. Hard boiled, oily and spicy food is avoided. The stream water they take is more healthy and palatable than our tap water. Their dwellings with thatch and mud floor are more comfortable, accommodative and healthier than the cramped, tin roofed houses with cemented floors provided to them under Indira Awas Yojana. The harmony between individual and community life attests the quality of life they enjoy in their society. Everybody knows how to sing and dance. Inhibitions are minimal. An individual, be it a man or a woman or a child, enjoys full freedom and self-respect.
- **Tribals have low I.Q. and low perception.** Quite often it is alleged that tribes do not develop as they have low level of perception; their children do not perform well in the schools as they have low I.Q; the goals of tribal development are not fulfilled because the people are less receptive and do not want to develop. The tribal people are blamed for the failure of all the schemes targeting them in the end. Very few try to understand them and their problems. If the tribal people have managed eking out a living by appropriating the natural environment and its resources very ingeniously and independently, and have built up elaborate and unique social structures and cultural traditions, how could they be said to have low level of perception and low I.Q. They know how to cultivate swiddens, how to prepare terrace fields and grow crops, how to transform streambeds into rice fields, how to transplant, how to have houses for congenial living, where and how to have village settlements, and how to maintain social relationship and social order. Everything they do has definite plans and perspectives. Everything is based on definite premises. Among some tribes the settlement pattern is linear, among others, it is circular and scattered. People are creative and have devised their indigenous skills and techniques suiting their own needs and aesthetic order. The tribal arts and crafts are unique: they have their styles, symmetry, regularity and aesthetic appeal. Every piece of work is highly innovative. Those who say that the tribes have low I.Q. and low level of perception are, therefore, totally mistaken.

- **Tribes are idiotic and foolish.** No doubt, the tribes have strong minds, and are very positive, straightforward, and bold in their outlook on life. In their own community, the individual tribesmen cannot tolerate someone breaching the trust and deviating from the social norm. The deviant is reprimanded and punished. When things go out of hand, they take resort to fight, sometimes even going to the extent of killing the adversary. Blood brothers unite in offence and defense. They are well conversant with their own rules and laws. Their skill and knowledge system is rewarding for them. They may fumble in the city the same way the city dwellers would ramble in the forest. Therefore, there is no reason to hold the opinion that they are idiotic and foolish. Given the right environment and opportunity a tribal child would be as successful as any other child.
- **Tribal societies are static societies and people are gregarious.** One would say, tribal societies are relatively static but are not frozen. Using the same perspective, one could see Indian society as relatively static vis-a-vis European society. People wrongly believe that the tribals do not like to change. Now the question arises as to what we mean by change in this context? Any people, no doubt, would change their way. But why should the tribals change the way we consider appropriate for them: in an antithetical way. In the physical world a body moving in the opposite direction appears to have greater momentum, whereas in the social world a society, when it moves in one's own direction appears dynamic. In tribal societies an inner dynamism is always operative. From time to time conflicts do arise and do get resolved. Individuals and groups live together, have their choices and decisions but are never gregarious in the way one may negatively define it. People fight for justice. They fight over land, property, and upholding self-esteem and securing group and community interests. Our myths and dreams about the tribes should be separated from their reality if we are going to gain a true understanding of tribal society. They live in harmony, but it does not mean that there is no dissent and dissension among them. Very patiently and diligently the village elders in the village council tackle dissension of any kind. This attests to the inner dynamics of tribal societies.

### **Tribal Development in Theory and Praxis**

Under the neo-development TSP (Tribal Sub-Plan) approach, the key development institutions, ITDAs (Integrated Tribal Development Agencies) and Micro Projects targeting exclusively the PTGs (Primitive Tribal Groups) were supposed to help ameliorate the conditions of the tribals and deliver the goods as implementing agencies in the field (Hasan:1992 & Singh:1994) But they have failed in several ways. The field personnel as implementers of development programmes are so much overburdened with day to day office administration, office management and control of activities that the field comes to be neglected or taken casually. They avoid considering the people's problems, and development work takes a back seat. Input and output are not taken into account. The target -- how much has been spent -- becomes the sole development indicator. The effect of their activities are not evaluated by themselves.

For ITDAs, office administration tends to become more important than development. Moreover, there appears to be not only lack of realization but also lack of clear understanding of what is 'development administration'. With the growth of road network and establishment of centres of growth and development in tribal areas, there occurred an influx of outsiders and government and non-government officials and agents into the tribal heart-lands. The tribal villagers observed them and their activities at different levels. Tribal people did become sensitive to the changing situation. At the same time, electoral politics altered people's lives in significant ways. As a result of all this, the socio-political situation has become more complex. The ITDAs and Micro Projects succumbed to pressure and encountered problems for which they were not prepared. The government, on its part, did not provide the with the support they needed. In consequence, ITDAs and Micro Projects got bogged down in routine activities without being vibrant and turned into yet another government office, like a district/sub-divisional/block office.

The lack of effective coordination among the various government departments sponsoring development schemes for the tribal areas presents another obstacle in the path of tribal development. The line departments like rural development, education, health and a host of other government departments only half-heartedly provide support to ITDAs, for the latter come under the administrative control of the ST & SC department. Healthy and organic communication between the departments becomes difficult at the bureaucratic level. On the other hand, due to lack of proper integration between and among the various infrastructural and income generating schemes the goal of holistic development of the tribes and tribal areas can not be attained. Even in the same district, between the offices of the district administration, the ITDA and the Micro Project there is no proper understanding, and there is always a power game which retards development work.

In the process of development, change is inevitable. While developing the tribal areas and the people it has to be borne in mind that nothing should be imposed on them. Peoples' felt needs have to be taken into consideration and people have to be taken into confidence before implementing development schemes for their benefit. In the process, if people choose to change in their own way, they should be encouraged. But, if we do not like certain aspects of tribal life and living and therefore constrain them to take recourse to our mode of life and living, the results will be negative, even disastrous.

### **Reconsidering Tribal Development Strategy**

From the perspectives of post-modern reconsideration of tribes and their cultures, and the government policies of economic liberalization, tribal development strategies need to be scientifically reviewed, reformulated. Tribal societies no more remain in their relatively static forms. They are caught in the process of transformation, and feel overpowered by the socio-political dynamics of the nation state. In this changing scenario, the functioning of Integrated Tribal Development Agencies (ITDAs) and Micro Projects (MPs) as the two main institutions implementing development has to be reconsidered along the following lines:

- The ITDAs and Micro Projects should not any more function as just any other government office characterized by bureaucratic delay, round the clock

pursuit of routine matters, an inability to make any headway in the field, in the tribal villages.

- The ITDAs and MPs should be given the required minimum autonomy to execute a meaningful development programme with inputs from scientists and the district administration. The latter two will have veto powers.
- The ITDA and Micro Project offices should evolve a system in which everything should be transparent, and managed and maintained systematically, chronologically and methodically as is usually managed and maintained in any scientific project office. Documentation and projection of work and achievements should be professionally guided and handled.
- Project Administrators (PAs), the chief executives of ITDAs should be dynamic senior grade administrative officers willing to work in tribal areas with an aptitude of learning tribal society and having certificate of undertaking a minimum of three-month orientation training course in "Tribal Development Studies" run by tribal research institutes. The training course will transform the ordinary administrator into a 'development administrator'.
- The Special Officers (SOs), the executive heads of Micro Projects should be junior level administrative officers, who will satisfy all other requirements applicable for the PAs of ITDAs.
- Research and development should go hand in hand. In each ITDA and MP, there should be a research scientist ( an experienced social anthropologist having experience of doing research in tribal societies and trained in tribal development studies). The scientist should be involved in all phases of the development process and interact and collaborate with professionals of various disciplines, from administrator to engineer to health worker to horticulturist etc. He should positively and convincingly respond to the challenges of his colleagues, and express his independent views.
- The PAs and SOs should be suitably empowered in their respective areas, and on tribal matters they should have a say. The district administration should promptly respond to what the PAs and SOs propose, heed what the views they express, and provide the support necessary for successful implementation of development programmes.
- The PAs, SOs and Scientists should be insulated from political interference. Their performance should be evaluated by the tribal villagers and reviewed by a high level administrator.
- Teamwork in ITDA and MP offices as well as in the tribal villages will have a lasting impact and enduring value.
- Before formulating action plans baseline survey and need assessment study of all the tribal villages covered under the ITDAs and MPs have to be undertaken in right earnest by temporarily deploying junior social scientists.

Short term time-bound action plans and long term perspective plans should be drawn for each ITDA and MP.

- There is a need for village specific and tribe-specific action plans. In this context, ITDAs can be restructured and divided into culture/tribe specific units and eco-cultural sub-units. Social appraisal and social mapping of ITDA villages should precede implementation of any development scheme.
- Before executing development programmes, development bias and risks should have to be discussed and debated.
- Tribal representation in Review meetings, Project Level Committees (PLCs) should be ensured and encouraged. Thorough discussions should be held.
- Men and women, young and old, all have to involve themselves and participate directly in the development process, freely and openly.
- The tribal villagers should take care of their own development harnessing their social institutional potential. The development agents and agencies should act as catalysts only.
- The PAs and SOs should have the aptitude to learn and acquire empirical knowledge so that they can exercise authority over the entire development project and there is no harm if, in the process, they develop a paternalistic attitude.
- The development executives and administrators should not hold the view that they know everything and know better, and that the tribal people know nothing. It is one of the major barriers to development praxis. This gap has to be bridged.
- Development programmes should not be implemented whimsically nor should development executives be subject to the whims and caprices of big bosses.
- Multiple agencies working in the same tribal area among the same tribal people should be discouraged. In the process of executing the works, it is quite likely that they may either manipulate the project or create further complications, all of which can have negative consequences on the tribal people and their society.
- Coordination, monitoring and concurrent evaluation should be regular practices in ITDAs and MPs. The role of PAs, SOs, and the Scientists is very important for the project and they should cooperate with one another. The personnel policy should be strictly followed in the ITDA and MP offices and strict discipline should be maintained.
- Good work should be appreciated and good workers rewarded. Criticism from any quarters should not be allowed to prove a deterrent.

## Conclusion

Anyone thinking of tribal development cannot afford to ignore its human dimension: it has social and cultural components and correlates. This theoretical premise has to be borne in mind and translated into action. In the present context, it would first require a renewed understanding of our tribes and their cultures and a critical assessment of their dynamics. Tribes today have to be restudied and observed comparatively, cross culturally and on that basis development policies and plans should be formulated and pursued vigorously. We cannot afford to be casual towards tribal development any more. They have to develop in a way they feel is suitable for us so that the elements they cherish in their cultures can be protected and preserved from threats from outside. This would warrant empowerment of people and a participatory mode of development. The traditional village councils in tribal areas should be re-activated, their informal labour cooperatives reinvigorated, traditional social institutional bases tapped, and their natural resource bases and human potential harnessed. Each ITDA should not only maintain an identity at the cultural plane but also a singular identity in its overall development achievements. Globalization as a homogenization process will meet challenges here, where culture will be pressed into the service of development. From this perspective, cultures would maintain their values and at the same time assume importance as valuable resources. The more varied the culture, the richer its cultural potential. In the cultural mosaic of India, tribal cultures are important ingredients. They are our valuable resources (Nayak:2000). The Human Resource Development concept has to be reformulated and indigenized. To look upon the human individual as the unit of resource is not enough: the family, the group, the social and cultural institutions have to be put to use as resource potentials for development. Tribal development policy should embrace a bold and vibrant tribal cultural policy. It is not a prognostication but practically very viable assertion. In the postmodern world, the postmodern thinkers and practitioners would rally round this 'cultural pluralism' or 'multiculturalism' hypothesis and enunciate postulates of development suitable to cultures. It would become a trend (Sachs,1997:6) The developed would never like the developing to develop in the way they themselves have developed. They have experimented with modernity long enough and should now look forward to post-modernity.

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# 'The Story of the Fowler'

## Popular Hinduism in South Orissa

Burkhard Schnepel

1.

In this paper I would like to discuss 'The story of the fowler'. I have collected examples of this text in the form of scripts and songs and myself witnessed them as dramatic performances while doing research on village theatre in South Orissa. Let me start by citing two passages from it:

Fowler: My Queen, the wealth of my life! I will bring a bird for you.  
You will kill it and prepare a curry out of it by adding turmeric.

Wife: How much food you ask for, my dear! There is no spice nor oil.  
So how can I cook?

Fowler: So much pride you express! I shall beat you and see if any father  
of yours can protect you.

Wife: So much vanity you show! You have no rice to eat. But you dance  
so much. You have no home and always you remain in the jungle.

Fowler: You witch, you have lice in your hair. Your sister wanders the  
streets. You live in the bazaar.

Wife: Your caste is that of the bird-killing hunter. I recognize you. You  
don't have any fear in your mind.

Fowler: You quarrelsome woman! You eat from the cooking-pot. Your  
sister walks in an unchaste style.

Wife: You have no caste and no family, my darling; but how cunningly  
you speak.

Fowler: You shake your ear-ring so much! With a single blow I shall  
make all your teeth drop out. You will cry because of me.

Wife: I swear I shall not remain in this house. You famine-stricken man,  
you shameless person.

Fowler: How strongly you speak! With a kick I shall break you down.  
You are trying to annoy me.

Wife: How much you lie! There is a goddess in our village, and you do  
not fear her! You forget my love and beat me.

Fowler: You quarrel without any reason and scold me without looking  
me in the face. (*Bina Danda* 1980, 18-19)<sup>1</sup>

Finally, the wife departs, leaving the fowler alone and moaning in his misery:

Fowler: Where have you gone, my darling?  
How can I live without you now?  
I got you by worshipping a crore of linga,

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<sup>1</sup> I am very much indebted to Mr R.K. Das for his expert help in translating this text, and the other Oriya texts that follow, for me.

And I also observed the Hari-Gauri fasting to get you.  
 O my companion, my companion of many births!  
 Because I was afraid of my younger brother,  
 I brought you to the jungle with me.  
 My friend, come quickly if you are hidden.  
 O trees, creepers, river, hill! You are all my friends.  
 Have you seen my wife?  
 My dear friends, why are you silent?  
 There are thieves, robbers and ferocious animals in the forest.  
 Has anyone violated her?  
 My queen, my jewel! All my deeds have gone wrong.  
 I see darkness in ten directions.  
 My darling, your eyes are like that of a deer.  
 How can I live without you? I am blind without you.  
 What shall I say to your parents?  
 How can I show my face to the villagers?  
 My wealth, you have made me restless.  
 I cannot think what to do and where to go.  
 My darling, the jewel among the women!  
 Leaving me, where have you gone? (ibid., 19)

The content of the fowler story as a whole can briefly be summarized as follows. Chadheiya, the hero of the story, is a fowler who lives in the jungle. He catches birds using a snare given to him by Siva (who got it from Yama, the god of death), but only under the explicit instruction not to kill various types of birds dear to the deities, namely pigeon, peacock, parrot, mina and swan. After a time, however, Chadheiya repeatedly transgresses these prohibitions, until one day he even kills a peacock in the precincts of a temple. Infuriated by this, Siva and Parvati make him die of snake bite. When the fowler's consort Chadheyani finds her husband dead, she laments greatly and attempts to bring him back to life in various ways. She asks a witch-doctor and a village doctor, but they fail. In the end, however, Chadheiya is revived when his desperate wife prays to Vana Durga, who in turn appeals to Siva and Parvati. These two deities relent and send Dhanwantari, the physician of the gods, in the form of a snake charmer, who does the feat by applying a spell in the name of Siva and Parvati. In the end, it is perseverance, love and deep faith on the part of Chadheyani which does the trick.

This basic story-line is subject to embellishment and variation. For example, sometimes there are two fowlers, resulting in a comedy of errors. Many humorous situations are created by the fact that Chadheyani and Chadheiya frequently quarrel with each other, revealing some secrets of their domestic and erotic lives to the amusement of spectators. It seems that the two cannot live together, but that equally they cannot bear to be apart. In other versions Chadheiya has a lame and ugly brother, who wants to marry his sister-in-law on learning that his brother is dead. In yet other versions, the fowler even has two wives. These variations on a common theme indicate that the fowler story is to be understood, in essence, as a dynamically changing creative process rather than a fixed product.

The various passages from the fowler story cited so far come from a little booklet obtained in Berhampur market called, as already noted, *Bina Danda*. This was

written, or rather compiled, by one Sanyasi Nayak of the same place, who is paying tribute to an older book written by one Srinivas Bharati. This latter author is constantly referred to in ways that ascribe not only temporal priority to his text but also, implicitly and explicitly, greater truth and sanctity. Srinivas is presented by Nayak as his guru and as a man of great devotion to the goddess. At one point we find, for example, the lines: 'I, Srinivas lie at your (the goddess's) feet' (*Bina Danda* 1980, 1), or: 'Srinivas narrates this story with the worship of Siva, Gauri and Brihaspati' (*ibid.*, 58), or he even 'interferes' with the action, such as when, at the end of the first passage cited above, we read: 'Srinivas says: "Let this quarrel stop"' (*ibid.*, 18). Hence, the text I have cited is put into chronological order and a hierarchical relationship with regard to yet another text of the same kind and style. Thus here we are encountering a text containing a legitimizing strategy that consists in referring to another text as more ancient, more valuable and divine, and to another author as having greater authority and the status of a guru.<sup>2</sup> As rhetorics, this *parampara*-strategy is about the transmission of authority, not information. Ultimately, all *human* authorship is declined. The story of the fowler is not a figment of human imagination, but a true story known to us through divine communication.

2.

So far we have encountered the story of the fowler only in its form as a text in the narrow sense of the term, i.e. as a script, as something written in a book or on a palm leaf or something similar. To most people in Orissa, however, the story of Chadheiya is known, not by reading it, but by having heard it sung and/or seen it performed. I wish to discuss these two performative manifestations of the story of the fowler—let us call them 'the song of the fowler' and 'the drama of the fowler'—in the following sections, starting with a discussion of a song recorded during the performance of the Sri Na $\hat{O}$ ya Samsad or Sri Dramatic Society based in Aska and directed by Sri Choudhury Parida.<sup>3</sup>

Having sung several devotional songs and songs in which the fowler laments the loss of his love and praises her virtues, this group proceeds to deliver a song in an Oriyan dialect and idiom spoken by the common man from Ganjam District. The content of this song differs in one basic respect from what has been presented so far: the main characters are not a fowler and his wife, but a washerman and his wife. The song goes thus:

1. The washerman comes in quick steps, being angry.
2. He has tied a red cloth around his head.
3. Being drunk he walks tottering.
4. There is no hair on his head.
5. He twists his moustache bravely.
6. He fears none, cares for none and dances swiftly.
7. He sings at a high pitch and laughs.

<sup>2</sup> In Hinduism, in general, it is often not the author of a text who is considered important *per se*, but his being a disciple in a master-disciple line of succession (*parampara*), the Sanskrit *guru-si $\hat{O}$ ya* relation. On this point, see among others Michaels 1997, 119-23. More generally, on the performative function of such 'disclaimers of originality' and 'appeals to tradition', see Baumann 1977, 21.

<sup>3</sup> Recorded by the Samrat Cassette Company.

8. His wife is not with him.
9. She has gone to her father's house.
10. Jogi says, 'His heart is wailing due to this separation'.

Music

As far as the actual performance of this song is concerned, in this passage and in the ones to follow, there is basically only one singer, though this single person assumes different roles. Thus in lines 1-9 he functions in the capacity of an outside spectator and narrator, describing the arrival and state of mind of the washerman. In line 10, however, he suddenly assumes the role of a specific person, not a character within the story but someone who is described as the author of what he has sung (and will be singing), namely a man called Jogi. We are thus confronted with a situation which somehow parallels that found in the *Bina Danda* text in the relationship between the compiler Nayak (here, the singer as narrator of the story) and Srinivas (here, Jogi). In fact, almost every song ends with the word: 'Jogi says'. The washerman's plight continues:<sup>4</sup>

11. Hey, washerman!
12. Yes, master.
13. Have you become a rich man?
14. No, sir, I have become the victim of liquor.
15. What sorts of beverage do you take?
16. Red Horse, White Horse, etc., like this I am addicted to four types.
17. OK. Then you won't wash my clothes?
18. What shall I do, sir. My daughter is dying for a rice-miller and my son for a banana-eater (i.e.: both are busy with amorous affairs). My wife is not at home. How can I do the work alone?
19. Is it like this?
20. Yes, sir.
21. The washerman weeps. He is worried.
22. His wife has gone to her father's house.
23. O, drummer. She has already been gone four months, making me sad; she has forgotten me.
24. We had a relationship like that of milk and water. That has changed now.
25. Being sad because of her departure, I have become frail.
26. O, drummer. She is like the garland of my neck, the pupil of my eyes. She is a soft woman whose face is like the moon.
27. When I think of her virtues, my heart is cut.
28. Even if I am separated from her for just a moment, my mind becomes restless.
29. Now, she who has thick hair on her head, has forgotten me ...  
(inaudible)
30. In this dense forest ... (inaudible) what a shame for me.
31. Her love is sweeter than honey, cream and nectar.  
(And so on for another six lines)

Music

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<sup>4</sup> I have indicated spoken passages by a hyphen at the beginning of each line.

Thus, after some music, another dramatic strategy occurs in lines 11-20, for this passage is not sung by one person but presented as a spoken conversation between two different performers impersonating a village-style patron and the washerman. In lines 20 and 21—and there is no pause or musical interval between these passages—we are back to singing and to the single singer as narrator. Suddenly, however, in the following lines, up to line 37, this very same singer, without changing his voice, impersonates the washerman, who is lamenting his absent wife, praising her beauty, etc. While doing so he talks to one of the musicians, namely the drummer and hence to a person outside the play proper (lines 23, 27). It also seems that, for a brief moment at least (line 31), we have left the streets of ordinary village/town life and are back in the mythological, somewhat arcadian scene of the fowler story. The song continues as follows:

38. The washerman's cunning wife swiftly comes out.
39. She smiles gently.
40. Her coy look steals the mind.
41. What a nice style of walking she has.
42. Wife: O brother. How far is your brother-in-law's house?
43. Brother: It is there, just a little further on.
44. W: Fate has decided like this.
45. What can we do? But I cannot forget his memory, says the washerman's wife.
46. B: Sister, don't cry. I feel weepy with you.
47. This song in metres and styles was sung by Jogi.
48. Swiftly and stylishly comes out the fisherman's wife.

After a short musical interval, we are thus back to the singer as narrator, who describes the washerman's wife (lines 38-41). Note that here, as elsewhere before and after these lines, there is an emphasis on describing the character's way of walking, a point which will become important when we turn to the 'drama of the fowler'. This passage is followed by a short conversation between the washerman's wife and her brother, in which it is indicated that she is longing to go back home (lines 42-43). Thereafter, the dramaturgy becomes rather complicated, because there are two lines of song and one line of conversation (lines 44-46), in which the singer assumes the role of brother and sister, followed by one line of song in which he refers to the superior author, Jogi, as the one who is saying this. Without any interruption, one then hears the same voice, but this time as narrator (line 48), before the following sequence of conversation starts with some repetition:

49. W: O brother! How far is your brother-in-law's home?
50. B: It is very near. Only a little further on. Sister, see! The man coming towards us seems to be the brother-in-law. Oh, yes, he is drunk.
51. Hey, brother-in-law. Welcome!
52. Husband: Who are you?
53. B: Don't you recognize me? I went to work in the colliery, doing digging work.
54. W: He is my brother.
55. H: I see. He has grown up.
56. You take your sister back. I don't need her. You keep her.

57. B: Won't you keep her? If you don't, then your father will have to keep her. And whenever you come to our place, I'll give you a nice beating.

The story continues in the form of a sung conversation between husband and wife as follows:

58. H: O, mean woman, I know you.  
59. Ignoring my words, you went to your father's home. You have to face the consequences.  
60. W: Master of my life, my husband, please listen to me.  
61. What mistake have I made that makes you so angry? Please tell me, my husband.  
62. O, my master, consider my words.  
Short musical interlude  
63. H: You have become unchaste, you sinner. What were you thinking of? I have judged you.  
64. When you went to your father's house, you did not think of me.  
65. You stayed there, you mean woman. I know you.  
66. W: Don't be mad, my husband. Calm down.  
67. If a daughter goes to her father's place, is this wrong?  
68. My master, please consider my point of view.  
69. H: You sinner, get out of my house.  
70. Now I'll divorce you. You get out of my house.  
71. I'll not see your face.  
72. You mean woman. I know you.

This passage is followed by a dialogue in which the vernacular becomes even more colloquial:

73. W: Hey, won't you see my face?  
74. H: No, never.  
75. W: You'll divorce me?  
76. H: Certainly!  
77. W: How can you do that?  
78. Five men of the village will sit and decide the matter.  
79. You will have to take out all the property that I have brought from my father to the road.  
80. I will be anointed with oil and turmeric and will sit on a bullock cart.  
81. You will sit under that cart.  
82. Twenty-one buckets of water will be poured on my head.  
83. You will take a bath in that dirty water.  
84. Only after that can you divorce me.

In this passage, we see that the wife ultimately takes up the quarrel with her husband, even showing herself superior to him in this. She threatens him with a panchayat and invents a

ritual of inversion, a symbolic reversal of the newly married woman's procession to her in-law's house. This also turns out to be a ritual of humiliation for the divorcing husband, exposing him to the impure water with which she was bathed earlier. This

passage is followed by a short song which indicates a change of mood on the part of the wife:

85. H: Those days are gone. Quickly you get out of my house!
86. W: Dear husband! Is there any king greater than Rama?
87. The grandson of Paulastya (i.e., Ravana) took Rama's wife and kept her in Lanka for fourteen months.
88. My dear master, consider what I am saying.

After this somewhat poetic linking of domestic strife in the streets of Berhampur to the *RĀmĀyaṅgEa* tradition, there follows another spoken dialogue between husband and wife in which the 'Great Tradition' is further referred to by the two antagonists, though in a rather earthy manner:

89. H: Hey, Ravana kept Sita for fourteen months in Lanka. She did not become unchaste.
90. W: But I stayed in my father's home for three days and became unchaste and you are throwing me out of the house?
91. H: Lo ... sinner! Sita underwent the fire test and passed it.
92. Can you be equal with her? I know you, mean woman.
93. W: Rama went to Lanka, killed Ravana and rescued Sita. Then Sita underwent the fire test. But Sita underwent the fire test only once. I face it daily.
94. H: How can that be? Can you explain that?
95. W: You go to the jungle and collect thorny woods. I use them to make fire. Is that not a fire test?
96. H: I do not accept that. Go back soon.

But finally the quarrel nears its end, and a romantic as well as amorous situation arises:

97. W: Dear husband, for a long time I have not done my duty.
98. My mind is restless day and night, tears flow from my eyes.
99. Hey! In whose family does this sort of thing not happen?
100. Let's go, or else people will laugh at us.
101. H: OK. Let us go! Come quickly.
102. Holding the husband's hand, the enticing woman says: 'Excuse me. Let us go and visit the forest. It is so beautiful.
103. There is a light breeze. Deer, bison, boar, and other animals can be seen in the forest.
104. The whole land looks beautiful. Deers are happily grazing in pairs.
105. There are so many flowers. Who can count them?
106. They have a strong fragrance. I shall use them to adorn my hair'.

With images like this, our happy couple moves further and further into the blissful forest and, so it is implied, towards an erotic encounter. And the audience moves back from the mundane life they know towards the arcadian setting of the story of the fowler, which, it must not be forgotten, is the theme of the songs preceding and succeeding the story of the washerman and his wife.

As far as the performative side of this song or, rather, group of interrelated songs is concerned, the performing group confronts the audience with a number of different angles to and levels of the story. On the one hand, they make use of the two most direct ways of communicating a story, by either taking the position of narrator or letting the characters speak for themselves. This latter angle usually takes the form of a dialogue, but we also have monologues (where the characters are somehow speaking to themselves, to musicians or to the audience) or dialogues (when the brother joins in). In all cases the songs are sung by one voice only. Only when we have spoken dialogues are there two different voices. These scenes and songs are sometimes, though not necessarily, interspersed with musical interludes. On yet another level, we find the main singer taking up a meta-level (albeit not a meta-commentary) in that he pays tribute to yet another speaker, Jogi. In other songs performed by the same group that cannot be discussed here, there is yet a further level: it is not another human being who is referred to as the original author but someone called Sudharma. Sometimes it is even said that 'the sound came from the horizon', implying that its source is not known or that it came from Siva.<sup>5</sup> And we find in other songs that sometimes the role of female characters is sung by a choir at a higher pitch. Variations can, of course, also be found in the rhythm and mood, though I am not able to discuss these with sufficient ethno-musicological expertise.

As far as the content of the songs is concerned, we find that the song of the washerman parallels the story of the fowler with regard to the interconnected themes of domestic strife and reunification of the couple, though this parallelism takes place on a more mundane level. While this shift in the frame of reference may take away some of the mythological and divine aura of the story and lead to a certain transformation of the fowler-hypotext into a parody, it also brings it closer to the day-to-day experiences and imaginations of the audience, as well as adding many subtleties and performative possibilities, especially as far as the comic side of the performance is concerned. This shift to the mundane lived-in reality of the people does not mean, however, that the washerman variant is understood by the actors or spectators as mirroring their own lives, nor does it mean that they view the fowler variant as being 'only fiction'. Both stories are accorded some kind of reality, though they refer to different levels in actors' and spectators' conceptions of reality and vary in their respective degrees of closeness to what the actors and spectators themselves experience daily. Sati's fire test is as real to them as the common housewife's experience of everyday-burdens, though it is also more remote from the latter.<sup>6</sup>

Moreover, in both versions it is the woman who is the real hero or, rather, heroine, since it is she who 'faces the fire-test daily'. While the husbands are at fault—the fowler kills birds, the washerman is a stubborn drunkard, and both husbands roam around neglecting domestic life, at the same time expecting their wives to keep it up and to comply instantly with their wishes when they return—it is thanks to the wives

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<sup>5</sup> The idea of Siva as 'primal narrator' is not uncommon in Hindu thought, as Lutgendorf (1991, 24) points out in connection with the *Ramayana*. Hence, from an emic point of view, Siva's narration is the archetext. Furthermore, the use of the term 'sound' stresses that, in connection with the story's origin, it is essentially understood as conveying an oral/aural experience rather than one transmitted by silent reading.

<sup>6</sup> It appears that washerman/washerwoman can be substituted by other 'subaltern couples', such as fisherman/fisherwoman, as indicated in line 48 of the song.



that both stories end happily. In the story of the fowler, it is Chadheyani's persistence in finding help and her devotion to Vana Durga that brings the fowler back to life. As for the washerwoman, she clearly surpasses her male counterpart in wit and the ability to quarrel. But it is also she who opens the way for an amicable settlement by showing herself more flexible and submissive at the right moments, and by knowing the *dharma* of the housewife. Hence, her heroism is ultimately that of Sita, not that of, for example, Phoolan Devi or other warlike heroines (*viranganas*) of Indian folk tradition.<sup>7</sup>

3.

The song of the washerman and other songs belonging to the fowler tradition are embedded in a more varied and larger performative context. Booklets and audio recordings are only secondary, modern-day offshoots of 'the drama of the fowler'. In its dramatic form, the audience can enjoy not only lyrics and songs, but also dances, histrionic arts and all the things (such as costumes) that go along with them.<sup>8</sup> Hence, in looking at the fowler story as a theatrical play, it can be seen that the verbal messages discussed so far intermesh with a variety of multivalent non-verbal images and actions. For the audience watching such performances, the content of the story (which by and large is known) and the semantic meaning of the words become less important than the style and quality of the performance. This fact, in its turn, requires that the external observer, who in many cases comes from a script-oriented cultural background and will himself produce a script of what was observed, pay greater attention to the way this story is actually performed and, quite significantly, to the way performer and audience interact.<sup>9</sup> As a matter of fact, the affective quality and effect of the performance and the ensuing interactive milieu, so vivid in many forms of Indian village theatre, are major new components which emerge when one takes the step from written text to the performance of this text in song or recitation, but especially in drama.

As is customary in many Indian theatre genres,<sup>10</sup> in dramatic performances of the fowler story, the various characters of the play enter the stage one by one to specific rhythms and styles of music, and, most characteristically, with dancing steps which are typical to them alone and through which one may therefore identify them. The various characters can, of course, also be identified through their costumes and, last but not least, through songs in which their appearances and roles are transmitted. These appearances, which at first glance may look as if they form an opening sequence, are in fact the thing itself. For, in dramatic performances of the fowler story, the plot as such is not acted out like the dramatic unfolding and following of a story-line in Western theatre. Rather, it is enacted piecemeal or as a series of sequences, by successively presenting the various characters, with the dances, songs

<sup>7</sup> See, for example, Flueckiger 1996, ch. 3.

<sup>8</sup> This use of a mixture of media is a characteristic feature of South Asian theatre in general. On this point, see Wadley 1989.

<sup>9</sup> In recent years folkloric and anthropological studies have experienced a re-orientation from text-centred to performance-centred investigations and interpretations, both in general [e.g., Bauman (ed.) 1992, Hughes-Freeland (ed.) 1998, Parkin, Caplan and Fisher (eds.) 1996] and as far as Indian studies in particular are concerned [e.g., Appadurai, Korom and Mills (eds.) 1991, Flueckiger and Sears (eds.) 1991, Frasca 1990, Hansen 1992, Kapur 1990, Sax (ed.) 1995].

<sup>10</sup> For examples, see Hawley 1981, Vatsyayan 1980.

and types of acting characteristic of them. Thus, the dramaturgy of the narrative is subordinated to the presentation of the play's characters, who appear one by one or two by two, acting singly or in pairs.

One of the main protagonists in these proceedings is a man known as *pata bhakta* or 'chief devotee'. This person plays a major role in the play similar to the *sutradhara* of classical Sanskrit theatre.<sup>11</sup> During the performance he appears without costume, standing at the edge of the stage, nowadays often in front of a microphone, and assumes a role which is comparable to that of the chief singer at the level of the song. Apart from singing songs which belong to the genre of the fowler story, the *pata bhakta* also sings songs of salutation (*vandana*) in praise of Ganesh, the elephant-headed god of auspicious beginnings, and in praise of Saraswati, the goddess of learning and art.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, during the play, he functions as a sort of master of ceremonies and as a commentator of what is going on in the play, thus standing both inside and outside it. In this role he acts as a mediator between the actors and the spectators, asking questions of and talking to the *vesas* as well as the spectators. This 'communication about communication', or 'meta-communication', represents a significant performative technique by means of which the audience are provided with clues for the interpretation of the drama's meanings and by which the dramatization of the story is punctuated and structured.<sup>13</sup>

Of the different characters within the play itself, Chadheiya and Chadheyani, that is, the fowler and his wife, are the most important ones. The former enters with a turban-like headdress to which a number of feathers are attached. In one hand he holds a pole, in the other a snare (*phasa*), and he introduces himself with a vigorous style of dancing. Then the *pata bhakta* asks him several questions as to who he is, what is the purpose of his coming and other things that introduce his role and the theme of the story to the spectators.

One of the most important characters in the sacred drama of the fowler is Binakara, the man who plays the harp (*bina*). He wears a red shirt and necklaces of beads. In his right hand he holds the harp shaped like a bow, in his left an arrow to which peacock feathers are tied. He recites Sanskrit verses, also explaining their meanings. He sings a story adapted from one of the *puranas* or one of the two great epics of Indian tradition. Using song form, he also answers various questions put to him by the *pata bhakta*. This Binakara is known to be no one but Siva himself. When he dances, the cobras, which he wears like hair on his head, hear it and become excited, so that they join in his dance, raising their hoods and hissing along to the tune of his song—or rather, this is what the spectators are told to see (and actually might perceive) in the spectacularly glittering and waving headdress of this character.

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<sup>11</sup> *Sutradhara* literally means 'holder of a string', and indeed, metaphorically speaking, this person weaves the 'Ariadnean thread' of the play. On preliminaries, entrance dances and the role of the *sutradhara*, see, among others, Mathur 1964, 39-47, 112-13, Richmond, Swann and Zarilli (eds.) 1994, 36-7, 66, 173, Varadpande 1990, 19-20.

<sup>12</sup> Lutgendorf (1991, 183) argues that the *vandana* 'is so common a feature of South Asian Hindu performance, both religious and "secular", that we may identify it as a characteristic "performance marker" for this culture—a sign to the audience of the moment of transition in the performance frame'.

<sup>13</sup> On the question of framing, see Bauman 1977, 15, Lutgendorf 1990, 18-29.

Karuani is the consort of Binakara, who acts as co-singer and co-dancer. She is none other than Parvati. They too quarrel in what turns out to be a wordy battle of wits and which, of course, also ends amicably with images of romantic love. The sequence with Binakara and his wife is often the longest in this drama. At the end of the performance, Binakara also sings the final song known as *melani*.

Another important couple are Saura and Sauruni. Just like the fowler, Saura is a hunter who lives in the jungle. He hardly wears any clothes and, in a way reminiscent of the tribal Sora people living in the Orissan hinterland, he holds a bow and arrows as well as an axe in his hands. Moreover, he wears a turban with feathers stuck in it. The dancing style of this character is vigorous. His consort is Sauruni, who decorates herself with jungle flowers, holds a basket, wears bangles and sells birds and berries of various kinds, singing 'berry songs' while doing so. She is an illegitimate child. It is said that a low-caste man was wandering in the forest, where he met the pretty daughter of a Sabara/Sora named Ksyati. The young man made love to her and she conceived, delivering a baby girl. The mother left the child in the forest, where another Sabara found her and took her to his hut. She became a beautiful girl, but nobody wanted to marry her because of her unknown parentage. However, Saura liked her and married her. Saura and Sauruni are both devotees of Siva and Vana Durga. They also narrate mythological and religious stories. Just like the fowler and his wife, they quarrel among themselves, but here too there is a romantic happy end to their appearance in the play.

Then, there are the 'snake-charmer brothers' (*sapua bhai*), Taxak and Kulina. When Siva became angry with the fowler, he called upon eight different species of cobra (*naga*) and asked them to kill the fowler. Of these, Taxak and Kulina took the image of snake-charmers, carried the conch- and lotus-cobras with them, and killed Chadheiya. Yet another character is the snake-charmer Kela, who is sometimes believed to be none other than Dhanwantari, the physician of the gods, in disguise. His role is to bring Chadheiya back to life. He brings with him a variety of snakes, sometimes real ones. As a great devotee of Siva and with this god's blessings, he is able to cure Chadheiya. Kela is a master of many forms of black magic (*guni*), for he knows how to benumb, delude, subdue, attract, kill, and is able to fly. He plays a wind instrument and a small drum, produces snakes and makes them dance, and often also dances himself. He sings songs about snakes and about Krishna plucking a lotus. Other songs relate to mountains and rivers, or they contain snake-cure *mantras*. Kela, too, has a consort called Keluni, who does tattoos and sings songs about them. Again, these two quarrel and then make up, thus providing a lot of comic relief.

Then we find in the fowler play a mendicant, Jogi, who lives from begging. After wandering from place to place and begging, he comes home, searching for his wife Jogiani, in order to ask her to serve him food. Yet again, there is a quarrel and even a fist-fight. Sometimes a group of jogis enter the stage together. Their scene is satirical, for it is shown that it is not their detachment from the world and their faith but their laziness which has driven them to take on the fake appearance of jogis.

It can be seen that all these main characters appear as couples. In this aspect, they (and with the exception of the snake-brothers Taxak and Kulina) mirror the dominant theme of domestic strife, separation and re-union prototypically exhibited

by the fowler and his wife. Even the divine couple Siva and Parvati act in this way at one end of a scale from divine to mundane, while the washerman and his wife stand at the other end of this (universal?) aspect of married life. Or in other words: Siva-Parvati, Chadheiya-Chadheyani, Saura-Sauruni, Kela-Keluni, Binakara-Keruani, Washerman-Washerwoman's wife, Fisherman-Fisherman's wife, Jogi-Jogiani, all these couples are not so much different characters, each with a separate story to tell. Rather, in their family resemblance, they impersonate different aspects, qualities or levels of one and the same 'coupleness'.

Apart from these main characters, there are a number of single or spouseless *vesas*, who appear in supporting roles. It is only through their appearances that the performance of the fowler story achieves its particularly rich dramatic flavour, providing the opportunity for many satires and comic interludes moving the plot on. These characters might even be considered so important for the overall success of the performance and for the progress of the plot that their characterization as 'side characters' and of their appearances as 'interludes' can only be made with reservations.

Among these single characters we find a fortune-teller, who is sent by the gods to warn the fowler before his death of the grave consequences of killing 'tabooed' birds. This man is understood to be Brihaspati, the 'teacher of the gods', in disguise. He goes to the fowler, looks at his hand and predicts that he will die of snakebite. He, the fowler, could only remain alive by worshipping Siva and Parvati. However, as we know by now, the fowler ignored his words and continued to kill the birds indiscriminately. Another character is 'Brother Dear' ('Bhaidhana') who carries two bundles of peacock feathers, swirling them gracefully while he dances. Then there are the witch-doctor (*gunia*) and a village doctor (*vaidya*), who are depicted as nothing more than charlatans trying to cheat the simple folk. Then there is a person known as Manginath, who acts as a mediator in the various domestic strifes; or, rather, tries to do so, his (comic) intervention often making things worse. Moreover, as can be expected in the Indian social context, the various couples are not without relatives, in-laws and offspring. Hence Saura and Sauruni have a daughter and a father-in-law/father; Kela and Keluni have a son; Chadheiya has a lame and ugly brother as well as a son; both Chadheiya and Binakara have younger additional wives (*sano* or little Chadheyani and *sano* Keruani). In some areas the Sora/Sabara is replaced by a Kandha, the Konds being another prominent tribal community of the region, in a sequence called 'Khanda Khanduni'. Then there are performances in which Vaishnava *sadhus* appear singing devotional songs, an activity which is made fun of during the performance and interspersed with humour. Or we find Brahmans represented in a way that severely mocks them. These and other minor characters vary from place to place, and new characters are added from time to time. In some stories a policeman (*jamadar*), a village watchmen (*chowkidar*), and even Muslim and/or British officials are introduced. They enquire into the fowler's death, suspecting it to be murder, thus turning the story somewhat into the direction of a Hindi film drama. Last but not least are various deities, of whom Siva, Parvati, Kali, Vana Durga, Ganesh and Ganga are the most important ones, while in some plays or local variations Krishna may come to the fore. Siva and Parvati also appear in the guise of other characters, namely Binakara and Keruani. Ganga, too, most often appears not directly as Ganga, but as Binakara's second wife. Kali does not enter the

play but can be said to preside over the performance in the form of a bamboo painting called *prabha*, which stands at the side of the stage.<sup>14</sup>

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A typical dramatic performance of the fowler story consists of dialogues and songs in Oriya, though at times Sanskrit verses are also recited. As far as spoken dialogues and scenes are concerned, some characters even speak in Hindi, Bengali, Telugu, Urdu, in local dialects of colloquial Oriya, or in mixtures thereof. Humorous passages and scenes occur throughout the performance, the humour being expressed through plays with words, battles of wit, slapstick, exaggerated scenes of quarrelling, funny styles of dancing or moving, and other histrionic ploys, such as when someone assumes the role of a clown (*vidusaka*).<sup>15</sup>

All in all, then, in the 'drama of the fowler', verbal messages, music, dramatic arts and numerous diverse and polyvalent non-verbal images are seen to be combined. Written texts, songs and dramatic performances closely interact with each other and form three levels of ever-wider encompassment, with the latter constituting the all-encompassing level. The actual performance of a fowler-drama would traditionally take a whole night, from around midnight until the early morning hours. However, these days it usually does not last longer than an hour or two, and I even saw one which was over after half an hour. In contemporary South Orissa, therefore, the whole story as outlined in the preceding sections is only rarely performed. At this point, it therefore becomes necessary to emphasize that this story is enacted during the festival of *Dando Nato*. This festival takes place once a year over a period of thirteen days in the month of *chaitra* (March/April)<sup>16</sup>, and as far as I am aware the fowler story is enacted *only* during that festival. These days, the shortened version is succeeded by night-long performances of melodramatic plays. Some priests and actors told me that the drama of the fowler need be performed only every thirteenth year or on special occasions, such as when some incident or misfortune occurs and a stricter adherence to tradition seems to be demanded. In normal years, sponsors and audiences nowadays tend to opt for modern theatre performances, so-called 'social dramas', which are very much influenced by the well-known plots, ways of acting and dancing, and songs from present-day Hindi films. Hence, the drama of the fowler is by and large pushed aside and substituted by Hindi films or, more correctly, by village-theatre style transformations of Hindi films.

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<sup>14</sup> For a discussion of the characters of the play and their roles in it, see also Dash no date, 9-13.

<sup>15</sup> For the role of the *vidūṣaka* in classical and popular Indian theatre, see Bhat 1959, Goldberg-Belle 1989, Vatsyayan 1980: 26-30.

<sup>16</sup> First introductions into the ethnography of *DanŌa NĀŌo* can be found in Schnepel 1999 and 2000.

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# "Globalization" as an Anthropological Perspective

## Some Issues and Debates

Helene Basu

In the pioneer days of anthropology; "doing fieldwork" involved a hazardous journey to those conceived of as being "timely remote" ("Primitives") and "spatially distant" ("Nuerland"). In the present age, most anthropological sites of fieldwork around the globe can be reached within hours or days. Nowadays anthropologists may communicate with fieldwork informants over the phone or via the internet. Even though, anthropologists still enter unfamiliar worlds whose cultural codes they try to master. Thus, in my own fieldwork settings in Gujarat the people whose life-worlds I was to study (Sidi, African Diaspora, Kutch / kingship, Ch@ra□), were as much as I aware of a twofold process in our encounter: on the one hand, at least in the beginning, we knew very little of our respective life-worlds situated in different places in India and in Germany; on the other hand, people in Gujarat and in Germany share with the rest of the world common, global, institutions – the visible signs of which may be airports, telephones or television sets. The concept of globalization refers to complex processes of interconnectedness through the flow of goods, people (migration, tourism) and information (tv, internet) around the globe fuelled by capitalism, time-space-compression and transnationalism. The globalising process in which the spatial and temporal distance between anthropology and its object-subject continually decreased, is, moreover, paralleled by the unfolding of a critical discourse questioning the theoretical foundations of anthropological constructions of its subject.

The paper was inspired by a journey through the lands of Orissa said to harbour the most "remote" corners of India. While travelling, by contrast, the society in Orissa showed itself globally connected in diverse ways – through the many internet cafés found in even the smallest taluka towns, through international tourists taken on "safaris" to "tribal villages", through migrant workers as well as international religious institutions such as ISCON. This situation invites some reflections on what anthropologists mean when they speak of "globalization" or "global processes". I would therefore like to present some of the issues that are currently discussed within the discipline of anthropology in relation to globalization, modernity and locality and also point out some of the contexts and relationships of this approach to epistemological debates at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### I

Theoretical concepts of globalization are shaped by interdisciplinary exchanges between the disciplines of sociology, history, anthropology and economics. An important forerunner to the concept of globalization was the (economic) world-system's theory developed by Wallerstein (Wallerstein 1974a) & b)<sup>1</sup>. Roughly at the same time, the sociologist R. Robertson, pioneer of the concept of "cultural globalization", worked on a similar project theorising "the world". He saw his own work clearly related to Wallerstein's: "On both sides (Wallerstein and his own) there

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<sup>1</sup> cf. Breidenbach & Zukrigl for a summary of Wallerstein's theory (1995: 17f.).

was a firm intention to bring the countries of the Third World firmly into the picture. (...) In both cases there was, (...), a definite commitment to seeing, in one way or another, the world as exhibiting systemic properties" (Robertson 1992: 13). However, Robertson also notes important differences between Wallerstein's and his own approach, particularly in reference to the treatment of "culture" and "societal reflexivity" (Robertson 1992: 13). For Robertson, the task lies in developing a model of the "global whole" in terms of a global order (Robertson 1992: 25). Culture plays an important part in this context and "... does not merely vary in status from society to society and from civilization to civilization. There is also extensive variation in the manner of its invocation, as well as in its very meaning" (Robertson 1992: 42). Culture, as will be seen below, plays a central role in globalization theory, having largely replaced the emphasis upon society and social relationships.

It is significant, that globalization theory as formulated by Robertson works with an all-inclusive concept of "the world". Images of the world and / or partial worlds may be variously conceived of as "closed communal" ("the global village"), "open-associational" ("global supermarket") or "open-communal" ("super-church") (Turner 1994: 80). As an example for the latter, Turner refers to fundamentalisms in the Islamic system in which "fundamentalism points towards a genuinely global Household of Faith which must place some limits on membership and which must retain some element of conflict with other absolutist systems " (Turner 1994: 80). The global whole is created by various dimensions of local-global interactions and cultural flows. It is interesting to note here that Robertson acknowledges his indebtedness to Louis Dumont for his own outstanding theoretical contributions to the theory of globalization. He particularly refers to Dumont's argument that "the world as a whole, the world in its totality, should be regarded as consisting in a set of globe-wide *relationships between societies*, on the one hand, and of *self-contained, 'windowless monads'*, on the other" (Robertson 1992: 25; original emphasis). In his own understanding, Robertson only extends the original "Dumontian question" by introducing four instead of only two reference points for relationships. These Robertson calls "national societies", "World-system of societies", "selves" and "humankind". They constitute the "global field" in which "quotidian actors, collective or individual, go about the business of conceiving of the world, including attempts to *deny* that the world is one" (Robertson 1992: 26; original emphasis). Moreover, there are other, more important differences between Robertson's and Dumont's approach to totality. For Robertson "globalization involves comparative interaction of different forms of life" (Robertson 1992: 26), while for Dumont the logical structure of the system was of foremost interest. Dumont used the term "global" structurally and in the sense of "encompassing the contrary" by attributing differential value to different levels (Dumont 1980). In his understanding, the term "global" refers to cultural systems such as Hinduism or caste that provide a "global" structure of South Asian values manifesting itself in local diversity. Diverse local forms are nevertheless determined by the same hierarchical principle that structures the global, encompassing level and which is generated by the opposition of values (pure / impure). In this sense, the global, encompassing structure of hierarchy is identified with "traditional Indian values" conceived of as in direct opposition to "modern (European) values ". It is this dichotomy that provides the basis of an Indian anthropology inspired by Dumont, whereas participants of recent debates of globalization precisely question this dichotomy and highlight instead its relation to fragmented localities that are embedded within multiple modernities. Implicit



assumption of an inherent cultural difference between West and non-West, Moderns and non-Moderns, are challenged<sup>2</sup>.

## II

Since almost two decades anthropological debates centre around the "crisis of anthropology": whereby is meant the danger of the discipline's losing its traditional object: The "Others", "Primitives", "Traditionals" in contrast to "Us", "Civilised", "Moderns". Since the peoples who were once deemed primitives by colonial discourse began to speak back and to question the ways they had been represented by Western observers, the dichotomy between "Us" (Westerners) and "Them" (non-Westerners / Primitives) has come under severe criticism. Anthropological "objectivism" seemed endangered. The so-called "Writing Culture Movement" took a leading role in the postmodern move against "master-narratives" of social cohesion. What was most at issue concerned the problematic of "representation": Who claims authority to speak for and about whom? The critique was further fuelled by a new generation of "transnational anthropologists" who seriously challenged basic assumptions upon which anthropological theory rested. They pointed out the biases in theoretical assumptions that started with the fundamental difference between cultures. Most influential here was Edward Said's critique of "Orientalism" (1978), the term referring to constructions of the "Other" through eurocentric categories and projections. The anthropological concern with globalization in the 80s and 90s was thus closely related to the perceived crisis of the discipline that was sharply brought to the fore in the critique of Orientalism (Said 1978), of ethnographic writing (Marcus & Fischer 1986; Clifford & Marcus 1986) and in the deconstruction of the traditional anthropological object of the "Primitive" (Kuper 1988)<sup>3</sup>.

The critique of Orientalism is focused upon the problem of "difference" as the basis for eurocentric constructions of the "Other". In this sense, Orientalism is seen as a discourse that posits a fundamental dichotomy between Occident and Orient (or "Us" and "Them") which firmly embeds the production of knowledge of the Other within a field of asymmetrical (colonial / postcolonial) power relationships. B. Turner drew attention to the far reaching consequences this critique entails not only for anthropology but for the social sciences in general: "The critical awareness of orientalism has produced a new awareness of the underlying general assumptions of Western social science, history and literary criticism. The process of de-colonization clearly cannot be separated from the de-colonization of thought" (Turner 1994: 100). The route to the "de-colonization of thought" led in the field of anthropology to a severe critique of ethnographic styles of writing based upon similar underlying assumptions of inherent difference and dichotomies found to produce reified and essentialised representations of non-Europeans / Americans. The projective character of anthropological reasoning also becomes apparent when looking at the history of the anthropological object. Thus Kuper notes that the concept of "primitive society" - which marked the foundations of the discipline of anthropology in the second half of the nineteenth century - appears as a "distorted mirror" of "modern society". The concept of the primitive set forward by Morgan, Maine and

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<sup>2</sup> cf. Breckenridge & van der Veer (1993).

<sup>3</sup> Marking the "postmodernist turn" in anthropology, cf. (Turner 1994).

others proved to be the opposite as well as the past of Victorian, modern society<sup>4</sup>. Following the theoretical advances made in the course of the last 150 years of anthropology, Kuper notes the eventual rejection of the concept of the primitive Other, despite its surprising persistence throughout its history which he attributes to the theoretical constraints of a discipline fearing the dissolution of its object. Instead of loosing its object, however, "social anthropology is changing its object of study. It is no longer about the primitive, and no longer particularly or necessarily about 'the other' "(Kuper 1988: 243). If this is so, then what are the transformed objectives of anthropological inquiry ?

For some anthropologists, at least, approaches centred upon a global perspective provided a solution for the crisis of anthropology and the resulting dilemmas presented by the epistemological critique of the eurocentric constitution of difference. Globalization theory arose, moreover, from the critique of progress oriented and teleological concepts of modernisation developed in the fifties and sixties and has by now become almost a synonym for modernity. Experiences of rupture and notions of crisis lie at the heart of sociological and anthropological debates of modernity. The crisis of anthropology is as much a product of questioning modern understandings of its subject as a reflection of the contemporary transnational and interconnected world. Thus, many anthropologists raised doubts whether societies are best understood as self-constructed wholes within the confines of a specific value-system who present themselves as coherent social organisms against or isolated from the outside world. What is called for is a perspective that highlights the ways and strategies which people in different localities employ for constructing themselves through accepting or rejecting contexts in which they are placed temporarily. This directed the anthropological gaze towards modernity which is no longer seen restricted to certain cultures or regions ("the West") but has been recognised as a global condition and an important new field of comparative study for anthropologists.

In the nineties, theoretical conceptualizations of the contemporary world put forward by the Swedish anthropologist Ulf Hannerz (1992) and the Indian-Diaspora anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1997) were particularly influential. While Hannerz proposed a "macroanthropology of culture" (1992: 218), Appadurai introduced the term "global ethnoscapes" connotating the fluid and permeable boundaries between contemporary cultures (1997, Chapter 2, p. 27ff.). Hannerz set out to study "cultural flows of meaning"<sup>5</sup> within the constraints of four different frames of reference which he called "form of life", "market", "state" and "(social) movement". The first (form of life) refers, according to Hannerz, to everyday practices of living that are characterised by stereotypical actions, cultural stability and redundancy (1992: 47f.). When the second frame of reference, the market, is invoked, the emphasis is shifted to the movement of commodities, their character as signs and to the resulting cultural instabilities of meaning. The third is the "state" which is an organisational form of power instrumental in national constructions of meaning that tend to produce homogenising ideologies. In the last frame, social movements aim at the

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<sup>4</sup> "For them modern society was defined above all by the territorial state, the monogamous family and private property. Primitive society therefore must have been nomadic, ordered by blood ties, sexually promiscuous and communist" (Kuper 1988: 5)

<sup>5</sup> Culture, according to Hannerz, consists in the interrelationships of three dimensions: "ideas and modes of thought", "forms of externalization" and "social distribution" (1992: 7).

transformation of established meanings. Interactions between cultures occur within a matrix of (multiple) centers and peripheries; their relationships are accordingly shaped by asymmetries of control over cultural flows of meaning (1992: 100ff.). Against the often perceived danger of globalization in terms of its leading to an ultimate homogenization of the world ("MacDonaldization"), however, Hannerz emphasised the increasing diversification and heterogeneity of the world in "world cultural process" (1992: 219). Moreover, he drew a very optimistic image of globalization as leading to a "global ecumene" in which cultures become creolized subcultures. Social relations are pre-constituted within the above-mentioned asymmetrical fourfold frame of cultural flows of meaning that are connected to interactions between different centers and peripheries; culture is then "mapped" along this structure which is likened to a "creolizing continuum": "At one end of the creolizing continuum there is the culture of the center, with its greater prestige, as in language the 'Standard'; at the other end are the cultural forms of the farthest periphery, probably in greater parochial variety" (Hannerz 1992: 264).

Appadurai is more critical of the proposed "ecumenism" of globalization, highlighting instead the perennial tension "between cultural homogenization and cultural heterogenization" (Appadurai 1997: 32). For him, the global cultural economy is a "disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models" (1996: 32). Concentrating upon disjunctions, Appadurai develops a five-dimensional model of global cultural flows consisting of a) *ethnoscapes*, b) *technoscapes*, c) *financescapes*, and e) *ideoscapes* (1997: 33). These "scapes" are characterised by deterritorialized flows of people, communication technologies, money and forms of imagination through the media (films, novels, tv, internet). His most original contribution consists in the definition of "ethnoscapes" as contemporary landscapes in/of imagination in which movements of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles and other such "moving groups and individuals" prevail. The contemporary world situation in which cultural boundaries often do no longer match localized, territorial boundaries but are, as in the many Diaspora communities of the world, of a fluid, transnational character, calls for a new "cosmopolitan ethnography" or a "macroethnography (1997: 52)<sup>6</sup>. This implies that ethnography should be firmly embedded in contemporary global ethnoscapes which change "the cultural reproduction of group identity" (Appadurai 1996: 48). Correspondingly, a new conceptualisation of the "local" and "locality" is needed (Appadurai 1997: 201ff.).

### III

To view ethnographic (local) contexts from a global perspective implies an analytical standpoint that is anchored in the historical present. From this position, the temporal simultaneity which is spatially fragmented. These fragments do not form a cultural mosaic, but represent cultural groupings with fluid, interpenetrating, transnational boundaries. Such is the condition of modernity which also fragments into diverse, heterogenous, interpenetrating, and plural modernities covering the globe. Thus, conditions of modernity cannot any longer be seen as confined to certain parts of the world while other parts remain supposedly non-modern<sup>7</sup>. If nothing else, at least the flow of commercial commodities has found its way into the

<sup>6</sup> cf. for example Ballard (1994); Basu (2000); Werbner (1996).

<sup>7</sup> cf. Hefner (1998)

most "remote" corners of the world. Consumption is a most important form of interaction between the global and the local. Global conditions of modernity produce consumers and mass consumption (Miller 1995; Breckenridge 1998). Miller defined the consumer thus: "...to be a consumer is to possess consciousness that one is living through objects and images not of one's own creation" (Miller 1995: 1).

Until recently, consumption would not have come easily to the minds of an anthropologist as a valid field of research. Rather, one would have typically searched for "authentic" cultural artefacts and ideas supposed to be uncontaminated by mass consumption. Public culture was held to be heavily influenced by "modern Western" forms, as, for example, soap operas on TV, fridges, washing machines, basket ball caps, designer cloths and other commodities of the global market. Locals were held to retain authentic differences only until they become victims of mass consumption. Mass consumption goods were perceived to stand for the threat globalization inspires, as cultural identity seems to be threatened by homogenization. Thus, if Indians aspire to possess consumer goods just as Westerners, if they adhere to the ideals of democratic equality just as Westerners proclaim to do, their worldviews are defined as "hybrid" or "westernised" – at least not as authentically Indian and therefore different from their own. Interest in analysis is then constituted by reference to difference. To aspire to new consumer goods is seen as a search for a "new superordinate point of identity (...) (that) subsumes and suppresses cultural difference and creates drastic global homogenisation" (Miller 1995: 2). Against this, anthropological studies did show that mass consumption on a global scale does not necessarily lead to cultural homogenisation. On the contrary and as a result of different forms of consumption, new forms of unprecedented diversity appeared on the global scene (cf. Humphrey 1995).

According to Miller, the task of contemporary anthropology is still comparison, even though it is neither cultures nor structures of ideas that are compared, but "comparative capitalism, comparative bureaucracy, comparative modernity and comparative consumption" (Miller 1995: 8). The comparative study of multiple modernities is based on the dialectics of the local and the global. Questions relate to how local diversity is constructed (and ruptured) under modern conditions. How are these consumed and experienced by different peoples in the world? Such studies show that one can neither identify modernity with Western ideas and developments only, nor is there a single, homogenic modernity. Rather, there are many modernities, African, Indian and probably 'tribal modernities'. The question, then, is how global institutions are experienced by people in the so-called "Third World". The focus is upon the ways in which people in various local settings appropriate global institutions and adjust them to their own settings and values, rather than asking how modernity transforms local cultures (Rawland 1995; Humphreys 1995; Das 1995). Interactions contain not only the inclusion of global forms, but also the reverse: the rejection of global forms and / or a deliberate closure against their intrusion by way of a denial of consumption at the local level (Friedman & Ekholm-Friedman 1995).

#### IV

Globalization as an anthropological perspective thus implies a greater concern with the conditions of contemporary modernities and consequent ruptures that are experienced by all peoples in the world. To recognise the importance of the

contemporary and the modern, however, does not mean that we as anthropologists should abandon our core subjects such as cosmologies, kinship and the local construction of social worlds. Conceding that cultures were and are interconnected and cannot, therefore, be studied in isolation, does not exclude the search for alternative forms of knowledge and meaning systems that are part and parcel of the anthropological endeavour. Rather, it means that one should give more emphasis to the context of modernity in which all contemporary anthropological research is situated. Our subjects may be termed victims or winners of modernity – but they all experience its institutions, whether in Orissa, New Delhi or in Germany. Global processes of commodification and commercialisation are noticeable at sites in Germany, in India or in Orissa. People in Germany and in Orissa are surrounded by similar signs of consumer culture, but to different degrees and partly with different symbols and referential frames. Still, popular knowledge of consumption practice is disseminated through advertisement in both localities – in Germany as much as in India or in Orissa. In both localities, for example, public events such as football matches or religious gatherings are sponsored by business corporations and transnational enterprises. In the same way, in which in Germany during a football match the name of the sponsor is prominently espoused in a moving display, in India the names of sponsors of temples might be advertised. In the latter locality even at religious sites, such as, for example, the Jaganath Temple in Puri, visitors are faced with an electronic signboard displaying a moving line in English and Oriya: "State Bank of India welcomes devotees to Jaganath." This line is followed by a request to give 'hundi' to the god. Today, neither the god nor the king but the banker and merchant, i.e. the market, appears as the most conspicuous patron.

This approach includes a rethinking of conventional anthropological categories such as "primitive" and the constitution of "cultural difference". In addition to the view that difference is constituted historically the modern condition calls for a perspective that allows for the recognition of novel forms of difference that sometimes have no historical "root", as, for example, those that are created by communication technologies. What this amounts to may be indicated by a recent newspaper notice found in "The Telegraph" (20. 9. 2000) on the front page under the headline "People's computer for just Rs 9,000". Indian scientists and computer technologists, the article said, designed a new computer called "simputer". A "simputer" stands for "simple computer" which is specially designed for the non-English-speaking, low-budget and illiterate public in India. A simputer works with icons, responds to voice command and by touching the screen. Computer technology thus attempts to reach a mass of consumers formerly excluded from modern communication systems by illiteracy. Here, anthropologists might be called for to understand important novel forms of modern identity construction that bypass the stage of literacy.

The ways and strategies in which people in different localities are constructing themselves through appropriating or rejecting contexts in which they find themselves contemporarily may show continuities with or the defence of preconceived value-systems. Thus, it is through attitudes towards global forms such as advertisement that local diversity as well as local resistance to global processes may manifest itself. An interesting illustration of this point was provided by another newspaper coverage concerning the protest of TV-spectators against advertisement practices of a leading television company. On September 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000, the Times of India reported "TV company in a soup for 'distorting' goddess Durga". Spectators had

taken offence of an ad which showed the goddess holding Tv sets in her hands instead of her traditional weapons, *trishul* and *khadga*, while the message run: "An offer so irresistible, no one can keep their hands off our TVs". People here resisted the attempt to "localise" mass consumption goods such as tv's through the association with traditional religious symbols.

While the interpenetration of the commercial and the religious might in itself present an interesting topic for study, the point to be emphasised here is that an anthropology which demonstrates how the response to global, contemporary forms is comparable by the same standards also creates an equality between the peoples of the world. The envisaged equality does not stem here, however, from the uncritical extension of Western ideologies of equality to people adhering to other ideologies, but to an equality of situation in a global modern world which is experienced in diverse and multiple ways.

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# Feeding the Dead

## Rituals of Transformation among the Gadaba of Koraput

Peter Berger

### Introduction: Death and comparison

Anthropological studies on death are widespread and although perspectives and approaches towards death rituals vary to a great extent, most anthropologists feel that social action, norms and ideas surrounding the subject of death can offer the key to quintessential aspects of a specific society (e.g. Huntington and Metcalf 1979: 2).

Also in the Indian context death is a prominent subject of research. Recent examples from Orissa are the works of Roland Hardenberg (1998) on the death and the regeneration of Lord Jagannath or Piers Vitebsky's analysis of the *Dialogues with the Dead* among the tribal Sora (1992). The Gadaba of the nearby Koraput District are the topic of the following article.<sup>1</sup> Whenever the Gadaba are mentioned in the literature it is mainly for the impressive way they give a final farewell to their dead in a ceremony called *gotr*.<sup>2</sup> Thus von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) gives a rough sketch of this ritual in his general endeavour to find traces of "megalithic cultures", while Somasundaram in the same decade is content to condemn "... this monstrous performance" (1949: 42). Izkowitz, who witnessed the *gotr* in the early 50s, provides the first professional description of "... this final feast of life" (1969: 132). A thorough analysis of the ritual structure and its implications is supplied by Pfeffer in three articles over the last seventeen years (1984, 1991, 2001), whereas Pradhan emphasizes the enhancement of group solidarity as a function of the *gotr* ceremony (1998). Only recently Das, a trained biologist, published a book on the Gadaba dedicating some space to the *gotr*. He offers considerable details and is one of the few who devotes some attention to the preceding death rituals (1999: 57-61).

Although the *gotr* has deservedly attracted such a high degree of attention it is however strange that other stages of the death rituals prior to the *gotr* are hardly mentioned by nearly all of the above authors, even though few anthropologists today would dispute the view that in most societies death is regarded as a process. In the following I would like to close this gap rather than focussing only on the *gotr* once more. In a concise form ethnographic data on the other phases of death will be presented. Furthermore, ideas and attitudes of the Gadaba concerning their spirits of the dead (*duma*) and of the possible ways people die will be discussed. The main theme of the article centres around the transformations of the person. It will be shown how the person of the deceased, consisting of three complementary elements, is deconstructed and removed from the living in successive ritual steps only to be reconstructed in the final phase of death rituals. Sacrificial food, prepared and fed by different social categories to the dead, plays the crucial role in this process of dying.



I would also like to point at comparison. This point requires some elaboration. If it is true that death rituals reveal core elements or values more than other aspects of any particular society and if one of the ultimate aims of anthropology lies in comparison, then ceremonies of death may occupy an outstanding place in the comparative endeavour of the discipline. But what do we compare and what could be the range of comparison?

Following Durkheim's sociology of knowledge the basis of many systems of classification and most "fundamental category" is the notion of the whole, the "concept of *totality*" (1995: 442, original emphasis), which has the "function" to encompass and "govern" other concepts. This theory has influenced many scholars and schools. Needham (1973) pointed out that by their nature categories, in contrast to rules and behaviour, are most eligible for comparison. Dumont further developed Durkheim's notion of asymmetrical relations between categories, i.e. hierarchy. Value-ideas (1986) have the capacity to represent wholes and to contain subordinate values. According to Dumont value-ideas are the objects of comparison, because they can represent a society on an ideological level. Thus, different from armchair evolutionists like Frazer or Tylor, Dumont claims not to compare out-of-context elements from all parts of the world, but relational entities which represent wholes. As far as the range of comparison is concerned the societies should be geographically or culturally related to be comparable. An example of such a comparison of four societies has been given by students of Dumont on exchange in Melanesia and eastern Indonesia (Barraud et al. 1994). Although from a different background Rubel and Rosman (1978) have much earlier undertaken a comparison of exchange structures of several Melanesian societies, i.e. within a confined geographical area.

For middle Indian tribal societies Pfeffer (e.g. 1982, 2000) has since long been engaged in comparison of tribal values and structures. He has proposed that the Koraput District of Orissa represents what might be called a "cultural area" (Kroeber) and has coined the expression of the "Koraput Complex" (1997: 16). Irrespective of administrative categorizing into 'ST', 'SC' and 'OBC', which is well known to the reader of *Adivasi*, or different languages, all communities of the Koraput Complex reveal, beside obvious differences, striking similarities in ideological structure and morphology. Thus different from the usual description of tribal groups of Koraput without any reference to other 'non-ST' Desia the interrelations of the different Desia communities should be studied and the whole set of Desia communities should be considered (*vide* Berger 2001a). Unfortunately this is mostly wishful thinking since not much ethnography can be relied on for comparison.

Thus the data on Gadaba death rituals presented below should be seen in Desia perspective. The people concerned are Gadaba *and* Desia and their idiosyncrasies as well as their participation in the wider societal configuration should be accounted for. Comparison of the modes and values of death rituals among Mali, Dombo, Joria, Goudo, Parenga, Didaye and others could be a valuable contribution not only to Orissan studies, but also to the discipline in general. As a small and modest step in that direction we turn now to the ideas and practices of the Gadaba regarding death.

## Ideas on death, the dead and dying

Gadaba religion generally centres around ritual action, especially sacrifice, rather than dogma or philosophy. This also holds true for their death rituals and researchers hoping for coherent eschatological beliefs are going to be disappointed. If pressed to answer people might talk about the 'other world', but these ideas would be very vague and accounts would differ considerably. Most Gadaba would answer with "how do we know?" or state that it is impossible to know such things. They are much more comfortable to explain what they *do* and what they *give* to gods (*mapru*), spirits of the dead (*duma*) or principally malevolent creatures like *soni* or *rau*.

However, as already told to von Fürer-Haimendorf fifty years ago (1943: 152, Fn.2), some people say that the "king of death" (*jom raja*) determines the time of death or that he is the king in the "underworld" (*patalpur* or *bitorpur*). On the other hand death is explained as a consequence of witchcraft (*pangon*, *onkar*) or the wrath of gods and spirits (*vide* Otten 2000). The dead go to the underworld and there do quite the same things as their living descendants, which is why they are provided with pots, hats, umbrellas and sometimes a loom to weave their clothes. After the final death ceremony on the other hand the *duma* are just said to be "gone" (*gola*) and the Gadaba do not care where they went. They have left the social world and all ties with society are now disconnected. No offerings will be given to spirits for whom *gotr* has been performed. Although the spirits are said to leave society completely they are also transformed back into living humans (*lok*). Thus, are there in fact two different types of 'spirits'?

In his account on Bonda and Gadaba "megalithic rituals" von Fürer-Haimendorf (1943) states that Bonda distinguish between two types of 'spirit', the *sairem* or "shadow" and the *siorem* or "soul". After death the latter goes to the land of the dead or to the supreme "sun-moon" deity, where he lives a life quite like that on earth. Eventually the *siorem* again dies and is reborn on earth into a child of the same clan. The shadow (*sairem*) on the other hand stays close to the living, is fed during death rituals and his family may provide him with a permanent resting place in the *gunom* ceremony (*ibid.*: 167f). Such a bifurcation of the person after death is however not reported for the Gadaba. With the help of death rituals performed by the living the "*duma*" can enter the land of the dead and further rituals only add to the wealth and comfort of the *duma* and improves their relations to the living (*ibid.*: 152f). Von Fürer-Haimendorf does not mention the aspect of rebirth here.

In a short section of his book Parkin (1992) compares the ideas of Munda speaking tribes in relation to "reincarnation". Like the Bonda (or Remo) their immediate neighbours, the Didaye (or Gataq), also distinguish between "shade" ("*saharem*") and "soul" ("*jivon*"), the former stays near the cremation ground after death, the latter also joins the supreme god. For the Gadaba Parkin also assumes "... two souls, one harmless, the other dangerous", although they do not have different terms for them and call both "*dhumba*" (*ibid.*: 213). "At death, the harmless soul immediately enters the deceased's SW, eventually being reborn in the ensuing generation ..." (*ibid.*), while the *gotr* has to deal with the dangerous aspect. Summing up his description of the different Munda speaking tribes, he finds that they generally

distinguish between a "soul substance", which reincarnates and a "personalized soul", which merges with the ancestors or gods (ibid.).

The Gadaba of the Lamtaput Block I lived with refer to the personalized soul as *duma* and to the impersonal life force as *jibon*, *jib* or *punda* (lit. "breath"). Therefore they would fit in the general pattern as displayed by the Bonda and Didaye. In day-to-day conversations people reported that their *jibon* was unstable in specific situations of shock or fear. With the physical death *jibon* leaves the body, "attaches" itself (*lagi kori*) or enters into another person (a woman) and is reborn. The reunion of the *jibon* with a new body is thought to happen soon after death but not in any specific period of time, rebirth may follow much later. All ritual activity, however, is directed towards the *duma*, the social quality of the person. Immediately after death the *duma* is most feared and potentially dangerous. The *duma* may be employed by sorcerers (*pangon lok*) to attack people or, if angry, may possess relatives on his or her own terms, harm animals or destroy crops. After about a month when parts of the rituals already have been performed the precarious period is over. One Gadaba explained that *duma* are precisely in a position to attack humans because they have *jibon*, otherwise how could they possess the living? Thus it seems that *jibon* or *punda* stays with the personal quality of the dead for some time after death in which the *duma* is a vital force, but is reduced to personal qualities or a social person when *jibon* attaches itself to a woman to be reborn later. Mostly, though not exclusively, *jibon* reincarnates in the alternate generation, i.e. the generation of the grandchildren and within the local line. However, there are exceptions, e.g. one boy was said to be the reincarnation of his 'FFZS'. The sex of the spirit does not matter, i.e. a male spirit may reincarnate into a female infant. Even several *jibon* may enter the womb of one woman. They then fight for the mother's milk and an infant containing two *jibon* is said to cry more than others. After birth the child is still associated with the realm of the dead, he or she is considered to "play" (*keliba*) in the "community of the dead" (*duma kul*) and is not considered to be a full living human being (*lok*) until he or she starts to eat rice around the sixth month.

There are good and bad ways to die for a Gadaba. Ideally everybody should die inside his or her house and when death is expected soon, dying persons are generally brought into their houses. Death in the house is agreeable while death outside the village is not. For fear of this type of death, which is considered to be highly dangerous and inauspicious, people frequently refrain from visiting hospitals. Especially to die on the way in-between villages is looked at with horror. Such spirits of those who "died on the way" (*bate morla* or *nindra duma*) are full of vengeance to the living. Of similar danger are the spirits of those who fell from a tree (*mursu duma*), hanged themselves (*utshki duma*) or drowned in a river. A woman who dies while giving birth will turn into a *sunguni duma*. 'Normal' spirits are transformed into *sagbo duma* if their descendants do not perform their ritual duties properly. They are said to attack family members and drink blood from their throats. Finally, probably the most vicious spirits are those who are killed by wild animals in the forest, these are called *bug duma* ("tiger-spirit") or *bon duma* ("forest-spirit"). Although their *gotr* is performed their *jibon* will never return to the living but stays in the forest.

After death all *duma* stay close to their house and receive food from the family of the deceased. Generally they do not harm people, but those who have died a bad death, frequently do. They may just make sounds at night or throw some pots over, but they may also possess and kill people, domestic animals and destroy the harvest. All spirits of such bad deaths require special ritual treatment to appease their anger. They are very hungry and are in want of more blood and meat, hence more animals have to be sacrificed. Although for bad deaths the "rule" (*niom*) prescribes "twelve heads" (*baro mundo*) of cattle to be sacrificed in the name of the deceased during the whole process of death rituals, nowadays it is generally agreed that two cows are sufficient, while the remaining ten are substituted by pigs or small animals like mice or lizards.

While bad deaths merely require only more sacrifices for those who died of smallpox (*bosont*) the procedure itself is different and the bodies are buried not cremated. The same holds true for cases of leprosy (*kusto rogo*). The dead body is not carried out of the front door (the only door in fact) but through a hole, which is made for that purpose in the back wall of the house and is also buried and not cremated. But generally there is no difference in ritual procedure for men and women, young or old people. Should an infant die before the name giving ceremony, he or she will be buried near the house where the umbilical cord has been disposed at the day of birth. Once a child has obtained a name it will be cremated on the cremation ground (*mosani, raisang\**).

#### The "day of death" (*morla din*)

If a person, let us take a man as example here, is about to die he is carried into the big room of the house and is placed flat on the floor. As soon as death approaches women of the house start to wail and weep heavily, beating themselves on the chest, tearing out their hair and scratching their cheeks. When death is certain the crying turns into a howl and women throw themselves onto the dead body and mutilate themselves even harder than before. Other women from the neighbourhood and the whole village approach the house in the typical way of mourning, their arms crossed behind their heads and join the women of the house. Men on the contrary are not expected to show their grievance, it is their duty to arrange the cremation. The mothers' brother<sup>3</sup> (*mamu*) of the deceased has to be informed immediately and likewise the *tsorubai*<sup>4</sup> of the deceased's local line<sup>5</sup> (*kuda*). The former has to receive gifts from the family of his sister's son, the latter have to perform the crucial tasks of the death ritual. In most cases both are from a different village and messengers have to be sent soon if the proceedings are not to be delayed. The body is cremated as soon as possible but often it is necessary to wait until the next morning. Then, women will mourn the dead throughout the night, while men gather around fires in front of the house. The spirit is believed to be close and everybody is on guard.

Among the *tsorubai* one person called *morodandia*<sup>6</sup> performs most ritual tasks, often assisted by the *mamu* of the deceased. The *morodandia* cuts the first branch for the funeral pyre, which is also referred to as a "house" (*gor*), then the others. If this is done the *tsorubai* build the bier (*dandia*) out of bamboo and a triangular frame (*jigri*) fastened with *siardi* -ropes to carry burning cow dung. Inside the house water is heated in a new clay pot and a small quantity of rice is cooked to be taken to the

cremation ground by the *tsorubai*. Everybody who comes to the house of the deceased brings a piece of white cloth and some coins along, which will be redistributed later.

When the *mamu* has arrived and all preparations are over the wooden door of the house is taken out and placed in the centre of the yard. The situation before the body is first taken out of the house is very tense, mourners throw themselves onto the door and others have to help them up again and hold them tight to keep them under control. All emotions burst out when the body is brought out, head first and just clad the way he died and placed on the door. A crowd of men and women rush up to the body and pour tumeric water over the deceased to wash him. After all the water is spilled the body is taken back into the house. Inside the house the body is dressed up and placed like a sleeping man, i.e. he lies on a bamboo mat, the head rests on a small bench, the deceased is covered with the white cloths all the visitors have brought and a blanket is put on top. All this is tied into a roll and some money notes are attached to the dead man's head, which are later to be taken by the *tsorubai*. Outside, the bier is placed on the door in the yard and the clay pot is broken by the *morodandia*, a piece of it put into the bamboo triangle (*jigri*) to carry the burning cow dung.

A second emotional climax is triggered when the dead body is carried out of the house the second time and put down on the bier. Generally brothers from the local line carry the dead to the cremation ground but any man could do it and in fact many just touch the bier with one hand to show their participation. Holding an axe from the deceased's house and the small clay pot of rice for the spirit the *morodandia* leads the procession to the cremation ground located just outside the village boundaries together with the *mamu* and other *tsorubai* carrying the *jigri*. They are followed by the bier, the other men and finally the wailing women. A member of the local line of the deceased throws the coins given by the visitors behind his back over the heads of those who follow him. They may be picked up by anybody or are just left behind. The bier is put down at the *bejorna*, the spiritual border of the village where *duma* are said to assemble.

On the cremation ground the pyre is once encircled in anti-clockwise direction and the bier is then put down. A piece of white cloth is spread over the logs and the body is placed on top. The bier is destroyed and afterwards burned together with the bamboo mat while the blanket and many of the white cloths are taken off to be distributed after the cremation. The *morodandia* covers the body with one layer of white cloth, tears off a piece of it and ties it as a flag (*siral*) to a branch of a nearby tree or bush to keep away spells of witchcraft. Then the thread (*ontador, tumuloi\**) every individual wears around his or her waist since a few days after birth is cut and further branches on top and big logs at the two sides are added to the pyre.

At the head end of the pyre the *morodandia* and one other man light straw with the burning cow dung brought in the *jigri*. Holding the burning straw with their hands crossed behind their backs these two move around the pyre and set fire at both its ends. After the fire is lit the *morodandia* touches the ground with the axe and passes it over the smoking pyre to the man standing on the other side, who also touches the ground and passes it back – this is done three times. When the axe is finally handed

back to the *morodandia* he smashes the small pot with rice and he and other men offer some rice (*betisong, leno 'bong\**) to the dead man's spirit. After the small clay pot has been smashed, the *morodandia* takes off the metal headpiece of the axe and rejoins it on the other side of the stick; he has "turned the axe around" (*tengia ulia koriba*). He then moves around the burning pyre and touches the ground with the axe on all four corners to spellbind the spirit. Everybody present throws a small piece of mango wood on the pyre. Those who do not enter the cremation ground, like Dombo, Goudo and other Desia, pass on a piece of wood to a Gadaba who throws it on the pyre in their name. All men salute the dead and leave, followed by the women. After returning from a ritual bath in the river the *morodandia* sacrifices an egg on the path and all men assemble at an appropriate public place near the dead man's house. It is time to distribute cloth, money and brassware to selected groups and persons. First of all the *mamu* receives what is called *gasi* or *dud moali*.<sup>7</sup> He is given a fine piece of cloth brought by visitors on the same day, the blanket with which the dead body was covered and a brass object, a *mota* (a small pot to bathe or drink water) or *tali* ("plate") or both (*moali*). Although the *mamu* may be dissatisfied he should not complain or demand more on this occasion. Also the *tsorubai* receive cloth, money and maybe a brass item, the village officials, helpers and others only cloth and a small amount of money. After all gifts are laid out in front of each person an old member from the deceased's local line formally addresses the assembly. He salutes everybody and proclaims the day for the next step of the death proceedings, the "fish water" ritual. Before entering their houses the participants of the cremation should take a full bath and change their clothes.

Although the main work of the day is over the *tsorubai* and the *mamu* again go to the cremation ground to check that the logs burn properly and do not fall into disorder. This is called the "last" or "returned wood" (*baura kat*). In front of the deceased's house the *tsorubai* cook rice in a fragment of the clay pot, which has been broken after the bath of the dead. This rice is offered to the spirit inside the house, at the place where the body has been washed and on the path leading away from the house. For some time after death the family provides the *duma* with food every day. Since nobody is allowed to cook in the house of the deceased until three days after death, rice, millet-gruel (*pej*) and beer is provided by the villagers. This donation of *duk pej* ("gruel of sorrow") is provided reciprocally between the local lines of a village. The *duk pej* is redistributed within the local line of the deceased, i.e. his whole group participates.

#### ***Mach pani* or a 'dong da'\***

Ritual impurity (*sutok*) after death remains until a ritual called "fish water" (*mach pani, a'dong da'\**) is performed usually on the third day after death. The central aspect of *mach pani* is again the feeding of ritual rice and *tsoru* to the dead. A place in front of the house, where the rainwater from the roof hits the ground, is called *osona* and is associated with spirits of the dead. At this spot the *tsorubai* cook rice and fish they have previously caught in the river in a new tiny clay pot. Inside the house women of the local line of the deceased, usually not the widow, also prepare rice and bamboo-sprouts. The *tsorubai* further arrange all items, which are later on taken to the cremation ground. Uncooked rice, rice water, cooked rice and fish (by the *tsorubai*) and cooked rice and bamboo-sprouts (by the women) are kept in

smaller or bigger leaf plates. After the preparation is over a *tsorubai* takes all remains of the procedure (small clay pot, the stones of the fire place etc.) away from the house to drop them at the *bejorna*. When he returns the offerings for the spirit are taken to the cremation ground.

Unlike at the day of death only few people, men and women, join this small procession, approximately ten to twenty people. Just in passing some liquor, rice-beer and rice is left for other spirits at the *bejorna*. On the cremation ground the *tsorubai* and senior members of the dead man's local line sit down at the head end of the ashes and place the offerings in front of them. The *morodandia* unties the small white flag (*siral*) from the tree, which has been left there on the day of cremation and places it on a remaining piece of bone, preferably from the head. Here all the offerings are placed, first by the men, then by the women. While the spirit is being addressed, he is told what has been brought for him and asked not to harm anyone but to leave for good. Men move around the cremation ground and throw uncooked rice at different places for other spirits of the recent dead and also women sit and weep on several spots and feed the other spirits. Not on the cremation ground itself but on the road leading away from the village offerings are left for the spirits of affines. The men leave first to take a ritual bath in the river; on return the *morodandia* again sacrifices an egg on the path and leaves oil and tumeric for the *duma* behind. Then he turns around the head of the axe again, as it had been before and proceeds to the house.

There the *duma* is fed again with *tsoru* by men and women and after everybody has done *betisong* ("to put down the duty/gift") the men assemble inside the house: *tsorubai*, other agnates and affines (*mamu*) of the deceased. A ring or armband either of the deceased or of a senior man present is placed in the centre of the house and the *mamu* is asked to do *tipali*, i.e. to pour some drops of liquor in the ring or armband for his sister's son. The spirit is then addressed and is told that his *mamu* is present and has done *tipali* after which all men drink liquor. Every man receives one plate of rice, the *morodandia* two. From one he again offers rice to the *duma* and distributes the rest among the plates of all others; everybody participates in the spirit's food as an expression of commensality.

### ***Bur or obdel\****

On the day *mach pani* is performed the period of ritual impurity which affected all agnates of the village is over, the household members of the deceased may eat fish and meat again and all other Gadaba accept cooked food in their house. Also the regulations, which concerned only the widow, are lifted after she gave *betisong* in her house. The last three days she was not allowed to wash, change clothes or cook.

If done on a small scale the *bur* may be held within a week after *mach pani*, but the appropriate time for it is the month of January (*pus*). As in *mach pani* the central feature of the *bur* is the feeding of the spirit with *tsoru*, but the *bur* is more elaborate and cows or oxen have to be sacrificed for the dead. Particularly, *bur* includes a feast and prestations not everybody can immediately afford. The aspect of feasting is usually treated as an epiphenomenon of 'proper' ritual activity, but for the Gadaba this aspect is exactly what makes a ritual "big" or "senior" (*boro*). For every "big

work" like the *bur*, which can be performed jointly by several households of a village, the preparations have to start way in advance. Firewood has to be cut, animals have to be bought, the auspicious days have to be fixed and the host must distribute large quantities of paddy to other households of the village in order to get it husked.

The ritual itself lasts for two or three days. In the evening before the first day, at dusk, the host performs a small ritual for the *duma* (*duma balo* '\*') at the *osona*. He sacrifices two crabs and announces the *bur* of the coming day to the spirits.

On the following morning a food-storage hut is built near the host's house and a long trench is made as fireplace to serve many pots. A specialist (*dissari*) performs a small ritual at the fireplace and inside the storage-hut to ward off evil spells (*onkar*), which might affect the rice in a way that it will be insufficient for all the guests. While the rice is cooked in large quantities for the feast others construct small bamboo-hats, mats and baskets to take them later to the cremation ground.

Before the first guests arrive at the house of the host with the usual gifts of husked rice, beer, liquor and pumpkins, the *tsorubai* and *mamu* appear around noon because they perform the major ritual functions. For each dead a cow or ox is sacrificed and the deceased's *tsorubai* and *mamu* cook *tsoru* separately in front of his house. The *tsorubai* only cook a small quantity of rice, which is exclusively taken to the cremation ground later, while the *mamu-tsoru* is consumed also by men. A ritual platform is made from water and cow dung at the *osona*, right beside the *tsoru* fireplaces. Then the cow or ox is brought, greeted with rice pressed on its forehead (*tika*) and *tsorubai*, *mamu*, household members and others invoke the spirit. He is told that his *bur* is being held today and that everybody has come to honour him. Especially if the spirit has caused trouble before he is strongly requested not to harm any more people but to be on good terms with them. Some hairs of the animal's tail and part of its left ear is cut and the blood is collected in a leaf plate with uncooked rice. The cow is then led away, killed by any man who volunteers and cut into pieces. If the *mamu* has received an additional chicken he performs the sacrifice at the same spot. As soon as the cutting work is over *tsorubai* and *mamu* get a share for their *tsoru* (including liver), some is cooked at the big fireplace for the feast later on and head and hip (*mund kulund*) are kept until the following day. Inside the house the women also prepare rice with bamboo-sprouts and a variety of black gram (*hiri*).

In the afternoon when all guests have arrived all prepared items are displayed on the veranda of the house. The three types of cooked rice (from the *tsorubai*, *mamu* and the women) are put into jackfruit leaf plates, one plate of uncooked rice with black gram and another with the blood and the cow's ear (*rokto caul*, "blood rice"). Further two small baskets with paddy, the tiny hats and mats are added. Women also take several pots of beer, glasses with liquor, tobacco and other items they think would please the spirit. The sons of the deceased or his brothers take his possessions along to the *mosani*, his plough, axe, umbrella and other things to be taken away by the *mamu*. On the way to the cremation ground he and the *tsorubai* again lead the procession, the women follow behind and show their sorrow in the usual way. After a small stop at the *bejorna* the men sit down at the place of cremation, where the head of the dead used to be, the women gather all around the place and put down



their gifts. The *morodandia* puts down the small hat (*satori*) on top of which the offerings for the spirit are placed. All men and women feed the *duma* with the different types of rice, beer and liquor, burn pieces of cloth and address the dead. After the men have fed the spirit and thrown uncooked rice all over the cremation ground for the other spirits they leave the wailing women behind and depart for the bath in the river. The women also leave rice on the way beside the *mosani* for the affinal spirits, those of their native villages.

Returning from the river the men sit down halfway on the path and a formalized discussion about the *mamu*'s requests starts. Everybody knows that this is not the moment for the *mamu* to demand things and yet he is asked for his demands. He declines all questions and stresses that he has only come to see the *hur* of his sister's son. When all sides have expressed their positions liquor is finally distributed into glasses and their contents are mixed and consumed.

At the house the men receive "house water" to wash themselves and everything is again prepared to do *betisong* in and around the deceased's house. For this, all of the above mentioned varieties of food are placed in front of the house where the spirit has been addressed by the *mamu* and *tsorubai* before. In addition, one of the cow's stomachs, called *pota* (*titing\**), is placed there. *Betisong* is given first by the *mamu* and the leading *tsorubai* on top of the cow's stomach, then inside the house, on the doorstep, the veranda and in the yard. All people follow and soon all these places are covered with jackfruit leaves (the 'plates' of the spirit) and rice.

Afterwards the women immediately clean up the floor of the house and the men assemble inside. Like on the occasion of *mach pani* a ring is put down on the floor and the *mamu* is asked to pour some drops of liquor into it (*tipali*). But he refuses, now is his time to demand *har moali* ("bone" *moali*) and everybody has expected his refusal. The men speaking for the deceased's family, including the *tsorubai* put brass items, *moali*, in front of the *mamu*, mention all things he already took from the household and remind him to do his work now. But the *mamu* may still demand more things, especially when he has brought a cow or ox earlier the day for his sister's son's *bur*, as is considered to be his duty. Negotiations may go on for some time. Eventually the men are reminded by the people outside the house that the whole village is waiting for them to come to terms. Finally some arrangement is made, the *mamu* pours liquor into the ring, which is afterwards returned to his owner, and then the *mamu* brings in the *tsoru* he has cooked in the afternoon. All men share the *mamu-tsoru* and only after they have commenced eating the rest of the village may start with the feast.

The following day centres on the exchange of living cows and oxen for raw meat parts. Cows are brought to the host's house only by affinal relations but he has to redistribute parts of meat also to several agnatic groups. How many cows and goats a host of a *hur* receives, depends on how many he or his father has given away on similar occasions. Especially the *mamu* of the deceased is expected to bring a cow and only then he has the right to demand *moali* from the house of the dead. If many cows are brought the host has to slaughter several cows or bulls in order to have sufficient meat for the redistribution. All those who have brought a cow receive one front leg (*podia*) to take back to their homes. Regardless of their contributions the

*mamu* is given one leg, the *tsorubai* receive a neckpiece (*gala*) and the *moitr* get the chest (*buk*) or the neck. *Moitr* relations exist between villages or groups throughout the generations. Although they may be from different clans they regard each other as 'brother'. It is a most sacred and therefore highly restricted relationship beyond 'ritual utility', i.e. beside their presence the *moitr* never seem to have any function in these rituals (*vide* Mohanty 1973/4, Berger 2000 and Pfeffer 2001).

The day passes with endless drinking rounds since the outside guests have to cover all houses they have relations with. Thus although only one or two houses may celebrate *bur* the whole village is busy receiving and inviting guests. Equipped with their pieces of meat they start to return to their villages in the afternoon or they may stay for another day.

On the third day most guests have left the village and the only work to be done is to eat the head and hip (*mund-kulund*) of the cow, which has been sacrificed for the dead on the first day. On every *bur* these parts of the sacrificial animal are kept for this purpose and either on the second or the third day all senior men of the village are called to eat *mund-kulund* together. No rice is served on this occasion where the beef is eaten along with a thick gruel of meat juice and millet called *rab*.

One week after the *bur* the spirit is again fed with rice. This is called "to return rice" or "returned rice" (*baura bat* or *ande lai\**), but it also connotes the "final" rite.<sup>8</sup> *Tsorubai* and *mamu* may be present but this is no requirement. Several dishes of cooked rice with bamboo-sprouts, fish, dried cow meat, uncooked rice, beer and liquor are taken to the cremation ground. Only a fraction of the crowd of the actual *bur* participates on that day, mainly household members and men and women of the local line. They do not stop at the *bejorna* but otherwise the procedure is the same. All offerings are placed on the *mosani*; men leave first for the river and perform *betisong* at the house. After this the host must again feast all those present.

### **Gotr**

As mentioned above this article intends to provide ethnographic data on the several phases of death rituals leading finally to the *gotr* ceremony, not to describe the *gotr* in detail. However, in order to understand the ritual movement and the transformations of the person in the whole process of dying the main features of the *gotr* have to be sketched.

A whole village or one of its local lines performs *gotr* about once in a generation for all those spirits who have died during that period. The ultimate aim of *gotr* is to get rid of the spirits once and for all and in this context not the *tsorubai* but the *panjabai* play the crucial role. This is another category of clan-brothers generally of a different village (*vide* Pfeffer 2001). About three months before the actual *gotr* the spirits of the dead are "raised" (*utaiba*) on the cremation ground and the hosts declare the *gotr*. For each spirit one or more water buffaloes are bought and in the month of *mag* (February) every *duma* is converted into a 'living dead' when he or she enters the body of a buffalo. This transformation is accomplished by the feeding of *sig* ("first"<sup>9</sup>) rice to the buffalo, consisting of rice and bamboo-sprouts and/or chicken, which have been sacrificed for each buffalo. The buffaloes are then tied to

newly set up branches near memorial stones of previous *gotr* celebrations inside the village, at a place referred to as *ga munda* ("village post"). Here all villagers and guests feed the buffaloes for one or several days.

The evening before the main day the groups of *panjabai* and *tsorubai* arrive in the village with rock plates, which are set up at the *ga munda* and later also at a similar place outside the village, the *gotr munda*. All buffalo takers behave in a wild and frenzied fashion; they dance all night around their buffalo-brothers and share their food and beer. After sunrise the rock plates are brought out and set up at the *gotr munda*, the buffaloes are dressed up, decorated and then led out of the village to be tied at this place. Thousands of people of the whole area have gathered to witness the final spectacle.

During the last days the *mamu* and other affines of different villages have possibly also bought buffaloes for their deceased sister's sons. These *purani* buffaloes have also been fed with *sig* rice, dressed up and are brought to the host's village on the main *gotr* day. In company of their own *tsorubai* and *panjabai* the affines approach the *gotr munda* with the buffalo in their midst. They rush into the village, are greeted by the host and immediately spin around to return to the *gotr munda*. Here the buffalo is killed in a very peculiar manner, all intestines are torn out of the living buffalo by anyone who manages to come near and the antagonistic groups of buffalo takers, from the host and from the affines, aggressively try to secure their parts. Then all the other buffaloes are untied and the different groups of buffalo-takers speed away with their prey – the dead have finally left. In the weeks to come the buffaloes are killed and eaten one after the other.

On the next day the buffalo-takers return to participate in a mud game together with the host's affines and bathe together afterwards. *Tsorubai*, *panjabai*, *moitr* and affines are then seated in a row to receive gifts and to be entertained with drink and food. If the *mamu* has brought a cow or even a *purani*-buffalo he will demand valuables (*har moali*) from his sister's son's family as on the occasion of the *bur*. *Panjabai* and *tsorubai* are not supposed to be greedy and *moitr* never demand anything anyway from each other. Then the feast continues.

Feasting must be reciprocated by all buffalo-takers within a couple of weeks. Thus the hosts are called to the villages of all those who have received buffaloes to be feasted. This occasion is called *panji kaiha* ("to eat *panji*").

### Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this paper has been twofold. It provides ethnographic data, which was lacking so far and thereby opens up the possibility of a comparison between death ceremonies within the Koraput Complex and beyond. A system of ideas and values that could be compared is not articulated as such by the Gadaba but has to be constructed or rather deduced from ritual action and comments on these rituals.

Ideas concerning the composition of the person and its transformations within death rituals may be a suitable perspective for comparison. What are the elements of

which a 'complete person' is constructed or deconstructed within death rituals and how does this take place? A complete person can be understood as consisting of all possible complementary parts and relations. Further, discussion of the concepts of the person make the need transparent not to focus on death rituals only, but to include all other life-cycle rituals and maybe even rituals of the yearly cycle, which may be otherwise classified as 'agricultural rites'.

Among the Gadaba a complete person consists of a life force or impersonal soul substance, which may rather considered to be an autonomous quality, the body as a physical property, and the social person or personalized soul which consists of ritual relations that are expressed in exchanges (of sisters, cows, *tsoru*, buffaloes and rock plates). While the body depends on profane food (i.e. everyday or non-ritual), the social person is constructed through reciprocal feeding and commensality of *tsoru* during rituals, i.e. it depends on sacred food (Berger 2001b). A newborn child, a spirit of a recently deceased and a married man then have some elements in common, others not. The married man and the recently deceased both have a social person consisting of relations created by ritual action. Further, both of them have life energy, the *jibon* of the man may be shattered by accidents or fear and the *duma* can possess people because it has *jibon*. Yet they are different since the *duma* has no body and further loses its vigour as soon as the *jibon* is attached to another body. At least this could be derived from the fact that the *duma* is only dangerous a short time after death and that *jibon* reincarnates within a similar period of time. Then the *duma* represents the social person only. Merely the social quality endures in contrast to the *jibon* and the body. A child is in possession of a body and of life energy, but it is no social person at all as long as it does not eat daily rice and *tsoru*. The social person is only gradually constructed by the ritual actions of the community. A married man (or women) is a complete person, i.e. combines all three aspects.

At death the complete person falls apart. Through cremation the body is destroyed, while the social person together with the life force represents a forceful and dangerous entity for some time. But the *jibon* soon finds a new host and through the *tsoru*, which is fed to the *duma* at *mach pani* and *bur* the social person is step by step further removed from the living. Years later at the *gotr* the process is reversed and the complete being is reconstructed by feeding of *sig* rice. The buffalo's body and life force are combined with the previously secluded social person. At this point the buffalo ceases to be an animal and may never be used for ploughing again. Similarly it may be argued that the social person ceases being a *duma*, since it will not receive sacrificial offerings (especially crabs) afterwards.

Beside the complementary aspects of the complete person itself the way these elements are ritually combined and recombined may be very different within the Desia Complex. Attention has to be paid to the modes of construction. Has ritual rice and *tsoru* the same fundamental significance in other Desia communities? As reciprocal ritual action preparation and feeding of *tsoru* must be regarded as exchange and has to be considered together with other types of exchanges and the categories of exchange. Which social categories are of significance within death rituals and related domains? Again in our example affines and several types of agnates are distinguished within the rituals (*vide* Pfeffer 2001): *tsorubai*, *panjabai* and *moitr*.

The mother's brother of the deceased (*mamu*) has a high status and is allowed to demand because he gives "milk" (*kir* or *dud*) and those who take his sister for marriage say, "we drank his milk" (*tar kir ame kailu*). For the gift of his sister he is immediately, during the marriage procedure, compensated by a calf, which also is given "for drinking milk" (*kir kaiba pain*). But later the milk is returned anyway in form of a bride for his local line. Further the *mamu* receives brass items, *moali*, from the house of his deceased sister's son, who is the product of his milk. First he takes the *gasi* or *dud* ("mother milk") *moali* at the day of death, later *har* ("bone") *moali* at the time of *bur* and *gotr*. For this he has the duty to bring cows at the *bur* and cows or buffaloes at *gotr*.

*Tsorubai* are those who have the ability to connect social relations in marriage, cases of excommunication or conflict and to disconnect social ties as they do in death ceremonies. However not the *tsorubai* reconstitute the complete person in the *gotr*, but the ritual specialist (*dissari*) and/or the village brothers themselves. *Tsorubai* never exchange cows, only buffaloes for rock plates (*vide* Pfeffer 2001). *Panjabai* only have the capacity to detach social relations and are therefore only prominent during *gotr*. They do not feed the dead at *mach pani* or *bur* but take away the recombined complete persons. Like the *tsorubai* they exchange buffaloes for rock plates. *Moitr* participate in exchanges of hospitality, deference and meat parts but they never argue. As Pfeffer points out, their behaviour contrasts with the other agnatic categories (*ibid.*: 113). Their presence is welcomed during all rituals but not required and generally their sacred relationship prevents them from visiting each other, because it may be a matter of "embarrassment" (*laj kota*).

What is finally the most distinguished quality of complete persons and sets them equally apart from the dead (also in their revived state) and gods is their ritual capacity, especially as sacrificers. Apart from life-cycle rituals in which *tsoru* is prepared to transform the complementary elements of life, village agnates sacrifice for gods and participate in a commensal relationship with them. Therefore also this aspect of the ritual system has to be taken into consideration.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> This article is concerned with the Boro or Gutob Gadaba who live mainly in the Lamtaput Block of Koraput District where fieldwork has been carried out for twenty-one months between January 1999 and April 2001. The Boro Gadaba speak the Oriya dialect of Desia as well as the Munda language Gutob. In ritual contexts Desia is the dominant language and most indigenous expressions cited in the text are Desia. All Gutob words are marked with '\*', like Gutob\*.

<sup>2</sup> There are of course some exceptions. U.C. Mohanty describes „Bond-Friendship among the Gadaba“ (1973/4), B.B. Mohanty writes on the „Economic Backwardness of the Gadaba“ (1976) and S. Som (1993) provides demographic data of a specific village. R. Baliarsingh and P.K. Nayak (1996) have written on social organization, while P. Sabat, N.C. Das and J. Dash (1998) again present economic and demographic analysis. Further I want to mention the books on the subject, like "Ollar Gadba of Koraput" by K.N. Thusu and M. Jha (1972); R. Parkin (1992) who mentions the Gadaba off and on in his account on the Munda speaking tribes, as well as V. Subba Rao and D.R. Patnaik (1992) on the Gadaba of Andhra Pradesh and „The Gadabas. A Handbook for Development“ by R.K. Nayak, B.M. Boal and N. Soreng (1996). Unfortunately much work on the Gadaba by Indian scholars is still unpublished and not easily accessible. I have been unable for example to obtain the dissertations of P.K. Mishra (1972), S. Som (1973).

<sup>3</sup> In many cases the mother's brother of a deceased person has already died. Then usually his sons or other male members of the local line take up his position in the ritual, but every senior affine may act as *mamu* if required.

<sup>4</sup> *Tsorubai* is a permanent and reciprocal ritual relationship between agnatic villages or local lines. The main function the *tsorubai* perform for each other is the cooking and in circumstances feeding of sacrificial food

called *tsoru*. It also is a commensal relationship since *tsorubai* in these context generally eat *tsoru* together (vide Pfeffer 1991, 2000, Berger 2000, 2001b).

<sup>5</sup> The term "local line" has been coined by Leach (1961: 57) and revived by Pfeffer (e.g. 2000: 339). Leach introduces this term in the context of affinal exchange. In fact 'local line' refers to diagrammatic representations of "local decent groups" (ibid.: 56f). The important difference with the notion of 'lineage' is that 'local descent groups' or 'local lines' depend on descent *and* locality. In systems where the genealogical bias of the 'African' lineage is lacking "local lines", detached from Leach's diagrammatic context, is a useful tool. Among the Desia *kuda* refers to such an agnatic group with common residence (vide Pfeffer 1997, 2000; Berger 2000, 2001a).

<sup>6</sup> Any senior man among the *tsorubai* can act as *morodandia*. Every time the *tsorubai* newly decide who should perform this work.

<sup>7</sup> *Gasi* refers to a low status community associated with death and cremation grounds. *Dud* is "milk", especially mother milk. *Mo-ali* relates to two brass items, *mota* and *tali*, the *mamu* receives. That he receives a milk item on the day of his sister son's death, may be interpreted as a return of the milk the *mamu* has previously given, i.e. his sister.

<sup>8</sup> Vide Gustafsson (1989). *Baura kat* is the last visit on the cremation ground on the day of death, *baura porbo* signifies the last day of the festival in April (*chait porbo*).

<sup>9</sup> Vide Gustafsson (1989). It corresponds to the inversion of the ritual process that after the "last" or "returned rice" has been fed at the *bur*, "first" rice is fed to the buffalo during the *gotr* and thereby a new form of existence is created.

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# Transfer of Children and Inter-group Relations in a mixed Tribal and Caste Society

Uwe Skoda

## Introduction

Reading the title one might think first and foremost of child bonded labour and the tragic fate of children in the carpet-knotting industry (Gupta / Voll 1999: 113) or elsewhere. However, in none of the cases of symbolic selling or throwing away of children described here any harm is done to them. Quite the opposite by selling them or throwing them away the parents hope to improve the health condition of their children and to help them to survive.

The objective of this article based on an on-going field research in the Sambalpur-District of Orissa is to introduce and to describe a phenomenon in a mixed tribal and caste society through which inter-group<sup>1</sup> relations are constituted. Children play a major part in the establishment of such relations. In the literature, however, the tribe-caste-continuum is predominantly analysed in relation to questions of Hinduisation in particular of tribal Gods (Eschmann 1994 [1975]: 211ff, Sontheimer 1994: 117ff, Pasayat 1998: 103ff) (or the opposite phenomenon of Tribalisation); it concentrated on relations within "little kingdoms" (Kulke 2001 [1993]: 114ff, Schnepel 2001: 271ff) or on agents of cultural change and acculturation (Pfeffer 1978: 425ff). The role of children as links between tribes and castes seems to have been neglected so far and I would like to start filling this gap tentatively.

## Selling of children

During my field research I came across a sphere of inter-group relations constituted by the selling (*bikiba*<sup>2</sup>) of young children. Before analysing the phenomenon I would like to describe four cases in detail.

### Four case studies of sold children

#### A: The selling of an Aghria-child to a Pathan-family

In this case a young Aghria-boy at the age of one year – now around 40 years - was sold to a Pathan-widow living in the natal village of his mother. The family had already three daughters. An elder brother - the firstborn son - had lived only for a few days. The boy himself was rather weak in his early childhood and was suffering from pain in his back. Under these circumstances the family was very much worried about the survival of this son. The now grown up son argued his parents might have been also afraid of a wrath (*abhisap*) of a saint who might have been badly treated once and therefore his elder brother might have died. However his maternal uncle



(*mamo*) arranged the selling to the family of Pathans, to whom a rather low status is ascribed. The Aghria-family hoped that the boy would then survive.

The selling itself as the father remembered was described as a rather simple act. The Pathan-lady was invited to the boys house. She put a copper-coin with the picture of Hanuman on the neck of the young boy. The father interpreted the coin with the Hanuman image as a symbol of strength which should be transferred to the boy. A Brahmin was not necessary. The rather loose relation between selling and buying family continued after the selling. The boy remained in his original family, but visited the Pathan-lady occasionally. The son remembered to have eaten in the home of the Pathan-lady during these visits. However the father denies that. The boy got the nickname Pathan. Later on the Aghria-family helped the Pathan-lady during some Anti-Muslim-riots offering shelter to her and her family.

Before the marriage of the boy he was repurchased by his family and the copper-coin was given back to the Pathan-lady. The boy had to be reintegrated into his caste (Aghria) in a ritual performed by a Brahmin. Furthermore a feast (*bhoji*) had to be given to the *jatis* (caste members of the village) to rejoin the caste formally.

#### B: The selling of an Aghria-child to a Kisan-family

This young Aghria-girl was sold at the age of seven – now she is about 20 – to a local Kisan-*gunia* (*gunia* as traditional healing expert) from the same village who was called often before the selling due to the frequent back pain of the young girl. Her father's mother then suggested to sell her to the Kisan-family. At the time of selling her the *gunia* spoke a few *mantra* and water was exchanged between the two families involved. After selling the girl she was seen as daughter of *gunia* and later when he died as daughter of his son.

She was repurchased immediately before her marriage two years ago. At that time the Kisan-family came with their *jatis* and a Kisan-priest to offer a coconut in a small puja and then gave some coins (5 Rs) to the Aghria which was explained as belated selling price on their side. Additionally they gave a sari for the girl and a brass pot. Again water was exchanged. Her Aghria-father gave 51 Rs and cloth for the whole Kisan-family to repurchase her. The grown up girl was then sitting on the laps of her father as sign for his parentship and his legal rights over his daughter. She had done the same – the sitting on the laps of her "Kisan-father" – when she was sold. Her father argued that the child should sit on a *purug* (a kind of cask to store rice made of straw ropes – a *purug* can be filled with five bags of 75kg or 375kg) filled with *dhan* (paddy) and should have a basket in her hand to collect gifts for herself. In this case however the *purug* was replaced by a smaller basket and the basket by a metal plate. In this way she collected more than 100 Rs for herself.

As the Kisan-family explained to me, they also demanded some items used by the child e.g. used cloths and dishes as a symbol of their parentship – things they are still keeping in their home. Furthermore they argued that the illness of the girl was not transferred to their family when the girl was bought by them – instead the child was cured while living in their family.

C: The selling of an Aghria-child to a Chamar-family

In this case a Aghria-girl – now an old lady of around 65 years – was sold at a very early age (roughly between six months and one year). In her case her elder sister died at the age of three before her birth and she herself was considered as very weak and quite often ill. Her parents were afraid that she would die too. She was then subsequently sold to a Chamar-family from the village of her maternal uncle (*mamo*). There was a particular belief, she explained to me, why she was sold to Chamar. As leatherworkers they used to put the leather on a line after tanning and later on used to moisten the leather with additional water. The salty water dropping from the leather was collected in pots below the line on which the leather was hanging. Everyone who would take a bath in that pot would be freed from all illnesses. The old Aghria-lady couldn't tell exactly if she had taken such a bath or not, but said it was quite likely that she had.

After being sold she got a leather-necklace from the Chamar-family which she was wearing until she was repurchased. It was given by the Chamar at the time of selling and was seen as identification with the Chamar. She called the Chamar as mother and father although she continued to live with her Aghria-family. Later on she also visited the Chamar-family occasionally and also had some light snacks (*murhi*) there (but not boiled rice). Furthermore the old lady said that she was treated to some extent as not belonging to the caste e.g. she got less food in a feast (*bhoji*), but she could in contrast to other Chamar at that time enter the kitchen and could use the same dishes.

She was repurchased before her child marriage. A *purug* filled with (preboiled) rice (*usna chaul*, not paddy) was prepared and she was sitting on the top of it. Her "Chamar-family" gave her the sari which she was wearing while sitting on the *purug*. The Chamar demanded a new sari, a metal pot, 5 Rs (silver coins – each ten grams) and the filled *purug* in order to sell her back to her original family.

D: The selling of a Kisan-child to a Harijan-family

As in the cases mentioned above the Kisan-child sold this year to a Harijan- (Gonda) family in the same village was considered as a very weak child. The parents explained that it was so weak that it had almost died. The child was sold for 1 Rs to the Harijan-family, but immediately afterwards the Kisan-family gave two chicken (a black and a white one) to the Harijan which the Harijan used to perform a *puja* in their home for *dharmadevta* (explained as sun god) as witness for the transfer.

According to the Kisan-family after being sold the child is considered as a Harijan – even if only temporarily (the child, however, can take part in feasts for the *jatis*). The child is easily distinguishable as a Harijan by a white thread (*suta*) soaked in some herbal medicine and given by the Harijan at the time of buying the child to be used as a necklace. This white thread is a symbol for the Harijan as traditional weaver community. The child got the nickname Gonda (the old caste name of the Harijan).

The Kisan believe, to have a "Harijan-child" in the Kisan-family excludes or at least reduces the negative effects of the evil eye (*najar*), of evil spirits (*bhut*) or witches (*tandhei*). The Harijan-buyer however argued that a change of caste and particularly from a higher to a lower one helps the child to survive. He also added that the rather

simple food of the Harijan (less oil, less spices, lower quality of rice etc.) helps the sold or from his perspective bought children to become physically stronger and to survive. Usually he took the children to his house for one or two days after buying them and fed them there. Contrary to the Kisan he did not see the evil eye as a reason for the diseases of the children he had bought (already roughly 50).

The repurchasing of the child has not yet taken place, but the Harijan argued that the money he had given for the child would be returned plus interest. In addition to that the child would sit on a *purug* (in his opinion roughly 40 kg) full of paddy. He would then take off the white thread around the neck of the child and extend the thread by some half-prepared threads (*mudha suta*) so that he can put the thread around the body of the child seven times. The child is then seen as freed from the Harijan-family, who additionally get the paddy of the *purug* plus four coconuts, seven chicken and some money all Kisan family-members give to get the child back. The chicken is used by the Harijan for a feast for their *jatis* and the whole procedure takes place in the presence of two *jatis* as witnesses of both sides. Also the Kisan have to give a feast for their *jatis* to reintegrate the child into their group.

Including the four cases just described I came across about 20 such cases in which children were sold.

*Diagram A: Selling of children – empirical examples*

<u>Selling group</u>	<u>Buying group</u>	<u>Number of cases (20)</u>
Tihari	Ghanzia	1
Aghria	Kisan	1
Aghria	Munda	1
Aghria	Harijan	2
Aghria	Ghanzia	3
Aghria	Chamar	2
Aghria	Pathan	1
Kondh	Mali	1
Kondh	Kisan	1
Kondh	Ludha	1
Kondh	Harijan	2
Kondh	Chamar	1
Gond	Harijan	1
Kisan	Harijan	1
Munda	Chamar	1

### Hierarchy and Purity

One characteristic of the selling seems to be quite obvious from diagram A – the direction of the transfer. However for a better understanding it seems to be necessary to introduce the local hierarchy a bit more in detail.

*Diagram B: Simplified model of local hierarchy*

Brahmin	Brahmin Tihari
Upper castes and tribal upper castes	Aghria Gond Kondh Mali
Lower tribal castes	Kisan Munda
“untouchable“ castes	Harijan Ghanzia Chamar

In this rather simple model I integrated only castes or tribes mentioned before in diagram A<sup>3</sup>. The highest status is ascribed to the Brahmins. The Tiharis as priests of the Aghria claim also to be Brahmins. The second category I have tentatively called “upper castes and tribal upper castes”, because it combines Aghria classified officially by the state as ‘Other Backward Class’, but also Gond and Kondh as ‘Scheduled Tribes’. In my opinion they form one category because all these groups share common high status features such as the services of the same Brahmins, barbers, washermen and ear gurus although they are differently classified by the state. A third category is formed by the lower tribal castes to whom the services offered to the second category are denied. The lowest group is formed by the so-called “Untouchables” who are internally further differentiated. For example Harijan claim a higher status because they are not working with leather.

Coming back to diagram A now it becomes clear that in all cases the children were sold by high status groups to groups with a lower status. For instance Aghria sold children to “untouchable” castes or to lower tribal castes. In some cases one can even discover a ladder-like selling downwards e.g. Aghria or Kondh sold to Kisan and Kisan sold to Harijan, Aghria sold to Munda and Munda sold to Chamar. Additionally Aghria or Kondh sold also directly to “untouchable” castes. Only the case of the Kondh selling to a Mali seems to contradict my thesis here, but there might be special status considerations or other reasons I could not yet discover. However it was usually clearly stated that the direction is from upper status groups to lower status groups and not the other way round e.g. Kisan would not buy a child from an “untouchable” caste etc. Also a selling within one’s own group is excluded.

To sell the children to groups of lower status also means to make them deliberately impure (*asudha*) as one of the motives to which I come little later and I shall describe at the end of this point even more ways of making children impure.

### The symbolic act of selling and repurchasing

Despite the inherent variation of the four cases here introduced some of the features can be generalized here. Firstly the act of selling is indeed an "economic" transaction – a transfer involving money. That means at least one coin was handed over to the family who sold the child – even if the coin had only a very nominal value or was handed over at a latter stage. Similarly money was paid, when the child was repurchased – usually a rather substantial amount compared to the initial selling. At the same time the selling or repurchasing was in some cases accompanied by a gift exchange (*sari*, paddy etc.).

Secondly the act of selling is not necessarily accompanied by a ritual performance, but it is noteworthy that in many cases the mother's brother of the child plays a vital role in arranging the selling. Not the selling but rather the repurchasing requires the presence of a priest and sometimes also the presence of *jatis* to reintegrate the child into his original group. In many cases the now grown up child sits on a *purug* of rice (either paddy or preboiled) while he is transferred to his original group. For a full reintegration a feast for the members of one's own group (*jatis*) is obligatory, which in turn is unavoidable if one wants to marry.

Thirdly in many cases the child gets attributes of his new group at the time of selling in order to be identified with them e.g. a necklace made of leather offered by 'new Chamar-parents' or a white thread as necklace and symbol of the Harijan as traditional weavers. However as far as I know these attributes were given predominantly by "untouchable" castes, but not by tribal groups like Kisan or Munda, when they purchased upper caste children. Furthermore usually the children get the name of the group in which they were sold as nicknames e.g. they are known as "Pathan", "Gonda" (the old name for Harijan) or as "Chamaren" (as Chamar-woman). In general they do not lose that nickname even after being repurchased – in contrast to the other attributes.

### The motives to sell

Common to all cases is that the child is considered as weak or ill, suffering from various diseases and pains before the selling. Additionally elder siblings might have died before. The parents feel that the life of the child is in danger and hope that by selling him, it will survive.

If one goes a step further and asks how the child should survive in that new group in which he was sold people usually either have no explanation or state various reasons. Some believed in the healing capacity either of water used by the Chamar in the tanning process (case C) or of a white thread dipped into herbal medicine given by a Harijan and worn by the child (case D). Others were afraid that they might have treated a *sadhu* badly and the bad luck of the family or child was due to the *sadhu*'s wrath (case A).

Additionally people argued that the change of the caste or tribe had helped the child to survive. In case D this argument was related to the less refined quality of food eaten in lower castes, which helped the child to become physically stronger. This line of argument relates to a cliché sometimes found in upper castes. Accordingly

lower castes are physically stronger and therefore hard manual labour or agricultural works are more suitable for them. Here it is important to note that almost all sold children have eaten in the home of the family by which they were purchased – even if it was only a symbolical act.

Still other people speculated that the selling of children helped to avoid or reduce the negative effects of evil eye, evil spirits, witches (case D). Here parents hoped that a member from a low status group (caste or tribe) in their own family would ward off the envy of other persons or evil forces in general. Usually the parents of a young child try to protect the child against the evil eye by performing several rituals, by giving protective amulets (*tawiz*) or by adding a black *tikka* on the forehead of the child to make him deliberately ugly. The adoption of a low status identity by selling the child could be another step into this direction. Furthermore a Kondh (himself sold in his childhood to a Harijan) argued that the God of Death (Yama) would not like to take low status children (or 'untouchable' children in particular).

#### The death of children after being sold

Until now I have discussed only cases in which the condition of the child improved after being sold and in which the child survived. But what happens if the child dies after being sold and not yet being repurchased?

An old Harijan who had purchased several children of whom some had died told me it is not necessary to repurchase a sold child after his death. According to him only unmarried members of the original group of the child carry the dead body to the cremation ground or cemetery and manage everything necessary there. Afterwards the parents have to give two feasts to their *jatis*: the first one usually around noontime for the reintegration of the child into his original caste and the second one (dinner) as essential part of the funeral. Both feasts are held on the seventh day (in castes like the Aghria the mourning period takes eleven or twelve days, but is shortened for unmarried persons to seven days). An old Aghria-lady whose son died after being sold confirmed the two feasts necessary and their meaning and also the fact that the child was not repurchased (no money was given).

Furthermore the Harijan has to celebrate the funeral (*kam ghar*) too. He has to call his *jatis* on the third day to act as barber and washerman, he does not eat oil for three days and he has to give a feast to his *jatis* on the seventh day, for which the food (rice, vegetables, but no chicken) usually is presented by the original parents of the child.

#### Throwing away of children and other symbolic acts

Here I would like to introduce four symbolic forms of dealing with weaker or endangered children which to some extent resemble the selling of children. But compared to that they rather offer an intra-group alternative to the selling of children. These forms seem to be not as common as the selling of children, but still I would like to mention them for a more complete picture

One such opportunity is to throw (*phingiba*) a child into the dust (*kechara*) or dustbin (*kechara daba*). As in the case of the sold children here the child – an

Aghria-girl - was rather weak and suffered from different illnesses. By throwing the child symbolically away or practically putting the child into the dust the parents hoped for the survival of the child and that it would get rid of her diseases. The girl is still known as "*kechara*" (dust). Another second very similar way to deal with the same situation is to throw a child into cow dung (*khata*). Afterwards the child usually gets the nickname *kathu* (for a male child) or *kathi* (for a female).

Slightly different is the third opportunity to put a child into the leftovers of a meal after eating. The child then sits on a plate with some food remains (*aentha*) for a short while. As an elder Aghria-lady told me, whose late husband was a case in point, this is done to make the child deliberately impure (*asudha*). The impure child remained in this condition until his marriage and a ritual purification and a feast for the *jatis* was necessary immediately before the wedding. He was also called by his nickname *aentha* (food remains). However the old lady argued that a child is not impure after being thrown into the dust or cow dung and in none of the three ways a child is considered as inauspicious (*asubha*).

Finally another way to transfer children is their "selling" to a Krishna Guru Party. Such a Party is established around a throne (*gaddi*) of Krishna, which everyone can set up in his house (recognisable for everybody by a picture of Krishna outside). Usually five to six members belong to a party. The membership is open to everyone including "Untouchables" and often the group consists of members of different tribes and castes. The Krishna Guru Party organises daily *pujas* for Krishna and is particularly active at the time of the Krishna Yatra. Above I have put the selling in quotation marks, because there is no consensus if it is really a form of selling. Some people argue it is not selling because no money is given, when the child is transferred, but rather some flowers and sandal wood paste are given to the parents and the child. The transfer of the child in their opinion is rather a gift than an act of selling and this gift is irreversible. However the child is given away and becomes a Krishna devotee (*bhakt*). The parents hope that the child under the influence of Krishna will be cured, positively influenced and not be taken away by the Yama, the God of death.

### **Conclusion: The selling of children and inter-group relations in a mixed tribal and caste society**

The mixed tribal and caste society in the Sambalpur-District is held together not only by the common worship of hinduized tribal deities and by continuing power structures of the former little kingdoms most notably represented by the still powerful landlords as described in the literature, but also by a rather subtle network of relationships established for instance by selling children. Apart from common rituals, from the work as labourers on the fields of the landlords or apart from newly set-up schools, inter-group relations are established by the giving away of children – however temporary and legally incomplete these relations may be. They form an important sphere of interacting and influencing each other.

Furthermore these relations operate in the wider framework of the local hierarchy. Children are generally sold from groups of relatively higher status to relatively lower status groups and not the other way round. The value of purity in the sense of

Dumont (1980 [1966]) seems to be of utmost importance also in this mixed tribal and caste society and might be a result of the persistent influence of the caste society in the region. Children have to be repurchased after selling or have to be purified after throwing them away in order to be reintegrated into one's own group and in order to marry. However the separation of groups or rather castes or tribal castes is not endangered by the temporary selling or breaking of commensality.

In addition to that children might be also repurchased or purified before marriage because it is widely believed that in the marriage Laxmi – the Goddess of wealth and happiness - comes into one's house in particular in form of the bride, which might also help to check evil forces endangering family members<sup>4</sup>. Furthermore in relation to other Indian contexts<sup>5</sup> one could argue that groups of rather low status or very ambivalent status often seem to have a relatively close link to the divine sphere and might use their proximity for ritual healing.

The selling of children and other forms of transfer constitute inter-group relations. It seems, however, it is a strategy of coping with illnesses and evil forces operating within a hierarchical framework. The selling is rather seen as a symbolic act and does not form primarily an economic act in the Western sense of the term. "The problem" as Parry and Bloch (1989: 9) observed "seems to be that *for us* money signifies a sphere of 'economic' relationships which are inherently impersonal, transitory, amoral and calculating... Where it [economy – US] is not seen as separate and amoral domain, where the economy is 'embedded' in society and subject to its moral laws, monetary relations are rather unlikely to be represented as the antithesis of bonds of kinship and friendship..."

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<sup>1</sup> Speaking of groups I'm not referring to substantial entities or fixed organisational units but rather to situational collective representations.

<sup>2</sup> Text without diacritics.

<sup>3</sup> Compared to diagram A I have left out the Pathan, who are living in very small number in the region, but usually are considered as having an ambivalent status with the tendency of a rather low status. I'm also not mentioning the Ludha because I couldn't gather sufficient information regarding their status.

<sup>4</sup> This idea originated in an discussion with Dr. D.K.Behera and I'm grateful for his inspiration.

<sup>5</sup> I'm referring here to the example of the Sidi documented by Basu (1994).

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# Voices of Gods

## Ecstatic Alekhs and Local Configurations of Mahima Dharma

Lidia J. Guzy

### Introduction

This paper will present a short overview on the results of on-going<sup>1</sup> research on Mahima Dharma. Mahima Dharma is a new ascetic tradition in Orissa consisting of monks and lay devotees, which proselytised in indigenous areas recently.<sup>2</sup>

In 1968/69 ADIBASI published an initial review article "*Impact of Satya Mahima Dharma on Scheduled Castes & Scheduled Tribes in Orissa*"<sup>3</sup> describing the statistical situation of Mahima Dharma in indigenous areas. Since the opening investigations on the spread of Mahima Dharma were initiated in the Puri, Cuttack, Sambalpur, and Kalahandi district the following paper aims to illustrate the situation of conversion to Mahima Dharma in the Koraput district.

In Koraput in 1972 approximately 22% of the total population are of indigenous origin<sup>4</sup>. Thus, the spread of Mahima Dharma, also known as an autochthonous Hindu reform movement,<sup>5</sup> might illustrate general processes of acculturation and the recent creation of new cults. The invention of religious tradition<sup>6</sup> in terms of Mahima Dharma in indigenous areas coincides with the emergence of recent religious identities and practices performed by new ritual specialists. In this context my paper will deliver an overview of how Mahima Dharma has been adopted in the indigenous context of Koraput and by which characteristics it is shaped. Since I described elsewhere<sup>7</sup> the structural features of Mahima Dharma of ascetics in Dhenkanal where the religion has its origin and its monastic religious centre (Joranda), I will not expound upon the monastic characteristics of Mahima Dharma<sup>8</sup>. Instead, I will focus on popular practices of Mahima Dharma in the indigenous lay context. From September 2000 to March 2001 I carried out my field research among indigenous lay devotees of Mahima Dharma, the "Alekhs".

In the last decade, proselytising ascetics from Dhenkanal (*babas*) spread the religion among the local (*Desya*) population of Koraput. Through several interviews with *babas* of Mahima Dharma during my field research in Dhenkanal (1999/2000), proselytising activities of ascetics in Koraput could be confirmed during the *tyagi*-wandering-period of every ascetic since the 1950s. According to my recent observations in Koraput, similar activities by *babas* from Dhenkanal could only be observed during the annual conversion/initiation (*dikhya*) time in February/March (*falguno*). (Temporal) Proselytising activities can thus be assumed for the last fifty years in this region.

"*Desya*" is a local term shared by all people living in the hills forming the hinterland of Koraput, outside the towns. Literally, it means „Locals“ and is similar to other

terms used for administrative purposes like *Scheduled Tribes* (ST), *Other Backward Classes* (OBC) and *Scheduled Castes* (SC). Up to the present day, the ascetic religion has been increasing rapidly among the *Desya*. Since the publication of the T.R.B. report no other statistical research was undertaken. My own socio-anthropological investigations were conducted with qualitative fieldwork-methods, such as "participant observation", not with quantitative statistical inquiries. Thus, my results will offer approximate data. In Koraput, two generations of converts to Mahima Dharma or Alekh Dharma could be found. They mostly represent aged persons (50-60 years) whose adult (20-35) children recently underwent the initiation in the last ten years. The annual conversion ritual (*dikhya*) involves approximately 2000 - 3000 new adherents, with the tendency to rise each year. The percentage of the Alekh Dharma adherents can be approximately assessed to 10 % of the *Desya* population.

I will describe some socio-religious features of Mahima Dharma - the "Alekh Dharma" - in Koraput. I observed that the structure of conversion (*dikhya*) to the new religion is shaped by five characteristics:

- 1) the traditional value of ecstasy;
- 2) semiotics of the divine;
- 3) local shamanic practices;
- 4) the social principle of seniority and
- 5) the modern quest for bureaucratic identity.

In my paper I will elaborate on each of these points; but before going into detail it is necessary to look briefly at the comparism of the two regional contexts of Mahima Dharma in Dhenkanal and Koraput in order to gain a better understanding of the regional diversity of Mahima Dharma in Orissa.

#### Dhenkanal

Predominant in Dhenkanal is the monastic, polycentric<sup>9</sup> structure of the ascetic tradition. The monastic organisation is always connected with local ruling elites who provide for the *babas*. In Dhenkanal, the asceticism of Mahima Dharma reflects the patronage system between local leaders and ascetics (*babas*). The Hindu tradition of otherworldly asceticism (*babas*) in rural Dhenkanal can only be seen in relation to local patrons. By sponsoring the holy men, rituals as well as the places of worship the worldly patrons gain religious benefits.

#### Koraput

There are no similar structures in Koraput. In Koraput professional ascetics are very seldom. They appear only once a year in order to initiate new devotees (*dikhya*). Instead of *babas* local ritual specialists themselves perform all religious rituals as ecstatic Alekh *gurumai* and *dissari*. Borrowing from Kakar (1984 [1982])<sup>10</sup>, Vitebsky (1993, 1995)<sup>11</sup> and Atkinson (1992)<sup>12</sup> I will call these local religious specialists "Alekh-shamans." Apart from the *dikhya* ceremony, Alekh shamans are totally self-sufficient in their therapeutic, ecstatic and prophetic functions.

The two different regions and social contexts depict two facets of asceticism. On the one hand, we are confronted with the Hindu version of institutionalised world renunciation in Dhenkanal. Asceticism of Mahima Dharma in Dhenkanal is embodied by male ascetics (*babas*) who interact with various worldly patrons. In Koraput, on the other hand, asceticism turns to ecstasy. We recognise a local tradition of ecstatic asceticism personified by female and male shamans in Koraput. In contrast to male ascetics (*babas*) of the religious centres<sup>13</sup> in Dhenkanal, ecstatic female and male *gurumai* represent the religious specialists in the periphery. The knowledge system of the new religion in Koraput lies not in an institutionalised set of values and ideas, rather in the non-systemic expression of ecstasy, considered as divine speech and highest authority.

Whereas the local Alekh *gurumai* tradition represents a matrilineal tradition in Koraput, the monk-organisation in Dhenkanal is shaped by a ritual androcentricity and a patrilineal structure. Religious specialists (*gurumai*) in Koraput have an extensive relationship to their mother's line. Their spiritual teacher (*guru*) is always classified as *mamu* (MB) and the predisposition for ecstatic capacities needed for all ritual activities is inherited from the mother's line. If the mother or her younger sister (MyZ) have been devoted singers of the divine and healing specialists it is probable that their children will have the same vocation.

### The Alekhs

Mahima Dharma in Koraput is known as Alekh dharma or better as "Alekhs". Alekhs wear *gerua*-coloured clothes, worship the earth goddess Basmati or Basudha and perform dissociate singing for purposes of divination. In order to become an Alekh one has to undergo the initiation (*dikhya neha*) either with a *baba* from Dhenkanal or with an authorised "elder brother" (*boro bhai*) from one of the local Alekh centres. The initiation involves receiving the sacred clothes/colours and taking an oath to God to adhere strictly to the religious rules (*niyam*) of Mahima Dharma. Alekhs neither drink alcohol nor eat meat and as such, are different from the common *Desya* (local) population. In general the *Desya* are known for their "pleasure complex", as Orans (1965) put it which is characterised by a variety of ceremonies, general intoxication and a preference for meat.

1) **The traditional value of ecstasy**<sup>14</sup>. Ritual intoxication is the primary path for the holy sphere in traditional *Desya* ceremonies. The ability to enter states of ecstasy is the prerequisite for traditional ritual specialists (*pujari*, *gurumai*) who, through this, communicate with the divine. Intoxication thus signifies the process of temporarily leaving the world. Pfeffer described the common phenomenon of alcoholism as "otherworldliness, or removal from material existence" in his investigations on the Koraput complex<sup>15</sup>. In this sense, the ritual consumption of alcohol (*mod*) can be regarded as an indigenous expression of worldly renunciation. Furthermore, dissociations of consciousness lead to divinations and to knowledge. Ideas and visions expressed during states of trance take on divine authority.

In this context we might ask how the values of the controlled anti-alcoholic asceticism of Mahima Dharma have managed to gain popularity among the *Desya* of Koraput. The answer could be that the *Desya* do not consider intoxication as an end in itself, rather as a means to attain ecstasy. Alekhs condemn on the social side-effects of ritual intoxication, but they value ritually altered states of consciousness. Instead of drinking, Alekhs alter their consciousness through extensive fasting, diet changes, music and singing. Mahima Dharma asceticism has been gaining popularity within the tribal context *because* traditional *Desya* society places great value on the ideal of otherworldliness, expressed by ritual ecstasy.

2) **Semiotics of the Divine:** Converts to the Alekh-religion use a symbolic code in their dress. The colour of their clothes is the same as the colour of the red anthills, local manifestations of the earth goddess. A symbolic identification with the goddess makes Alekhs as holy as the earth. As such they become capable of divine communication. As oracles, as husbands or wives of the earth goddess or other male and female Hindu deities, they become virtuoso singers of the Divine. Their improvisations while in trance represent the code of their "religious language"<sup>16</sup>. Religious language implies polyvocality, glossolaly and the constant shifting from singing to uttering cries, from invocation to oral poetry. The code used in divine communication expresses the holy Otherness. Dialogues with the supernatural are expressed by sequences of glossolaly, by polyglot shifts from one language to another and in general by incomprehensibility. The monotone, one-string music of the *dudunga* symbolises the rhythm of the holy sphere into which the Alekh *gurumai* gets absorbed. While playing the *dudunga*, Alekh *gurumai* become the voices of gods.

3) **Local shamanic practices:** Initiation into the Alekh-religion allows the devotees to perform traditional shamanic (*gurumai*) practices; that means to communicate with the divine while singing with the one-stringed instrument *dudunga*, to go on a spiritual trip while being in trance (*baya*) and to cure patients by questioning the supernatural. Even if they have reached this stage, not every Alekh will be considered an Alekh *gurumai*. To become an Alekh shaman it is necessary to convince the community that he or she had no choice but to undergo the Alekh *dikhya*. Alekh *gurumai* often tell of their long-suffering, destructive dreams and attacks of madness ("*baya*") before having undergone the *dikhya*. Had they not done so they would have died, they insist. Only by receiving the *gerua* clothes were they able to be cured. Thus, their destructive madness (*baya*) was transformed into the capacity to heal and communicate with the supernatural, which Alekh shamans described as "good" *baya*. The next step in becoming a socially respected and sought after religious and therapeutic specialist consists of a symbolic marriage - the *alekh biba* - with a favoured god or goddess. After an elaborate and costly marriage ceremony, the worldly Alekh bride or bridegroom - comparable with Vitebsky's discription of the Sora - will meet her or his lover while going "*baya*". The altered state of consciousness<sup>17</sup> is preceded by long fasting and will finally culminate in a dialogue with the divine spouse. Thereafter, the Alekh *gurumai*'s utterances and singing will heal individual and collective ailments. Accompanied by the sound of the *dudunga* the new shaman will utter prophecies, and give advice to suffering clients.

In contrast to the worldly human marriage practices of the *Desya*, where divorce is a culturally accepted pattern of behaviour, the Alekh *biba* is irreversible. Once an Alekh followed her or his vocation for the spiritual marriage it will not be reversible anymore. Once married with gods, it is considered forever. Only through the marriage idiom will the Alekh become an Alekh-shaman, the female or male "Alekh-*gurumai*". With regard to the category "*gurumai*", it is important to note that it literally means "the bride (*mai*<sup>18</sup>) of her husband (*guru*)". Either male or female, both Alekh bride and bridegroom are classified as brides of the chosen deity. Whether male or female all *gurumai* form the female part of the Alekh-*biba* however in *baya* trances the *gurumai* can transform their gender into male and female roles visible in different forms of ritual speeches. A similar phenomenon is known from devotional religious traditions, as for instance Sufism<sup>19</sup> and *bhakti*<sup>20</sup>. The marriage idiom of the Alekh *biba* represents the crucial social values of worldly marriage. Here the bride stands for alliances and systems of exchange between affinal groups demonstrating the *fait social total*<sup>21</sup> ("the total social fact") of marriage. The spiritual marriage of the Alekhs is the basis for communication between the sphere of gods and of humans. After the Alekh-*biba* Alekh shamans will heal with their words and voices and, as such, Alekh shamanic tradition is deeply inscribed in the *gurumai* and *dissari* tradition of the *Desya*<sup>22</sup>.

While Alekh religion makes use of traditional local knowledge and therapeutic remedies, it also contains at the same time a pragmatic element which alienates it from traditional ritual practices. An example is the abstinence from alcohol and blood sacrifice which saves the Alekh community a lot of money, for instance. It also shows the self-confidence and strength of conviction the Alekhs have. Of course Alekhs do not fear insulting the traditional gods and goddesses by offering them only a coconut and not the traditional animal sacrifice. This vegetarian and anti-alcohol orientation might reflect the impact of value systems of the alien brahmanic Hindu culture. The belief in the power of Alekh could be understood as a belief that the god of the others is stronger. God Alekh is generally associated with the earth goddess Basmati, but also with Shiva, Lakshmi, Durga or Jagannath. During ritual trances Alekh shamans meet their divine spouses, they consult them, speak with them and get possessed by them in order to cure. In this sense ritual practices of Alekhs continue traditional forms of religiosity and knowledge. At the same time they operate within the brahmanic Hindu code of vegetarianism. The Alekh religion in Koraput can be thus regarded as an indigenous healing technique within the processes of acculturation. Acculturation is understood here in the sense of Herskovits as "cultural transmission in process" (1964: 170)<sup>23</sup>.

4) **The social principle of seniority.** Individual motivation for conversion to the Alekh religion is closely connected with the sociological principle of seniority within the patrilineal clan- and lineage system of the *Desya* in Koraput<sup>24</sup>. The relationship between the *Desya* is largely determined by whether one is junior or senior; this is the most frequent source of quarrels and rivalries. It was observed that, mostly junior brothers or phratries converted to the Alekh religion. By attaining ritual seniority, social juniors improve their status. Senior brothers were responsible for performing rituals for the earth goddess. In the case of ritual neglect, unhappiness, misfortune or illness could befall the family and the clan. With the seniors thus occupied, juniors

were free to experiment with new cults. Seniors had no need to try out new religious orientations since their traditional ritual obligation guaranteed them the highest respect within the community.

Conversion to the Alekh religion should not be understood in the western and monotheistic sense of irreversibility. Conversion in the *Desya* context means testifying powers of the new god. If a family suffers child mortality, misfortune or diseases after having taken *dikhya* to the Alekh religion the new adherents might soon return to their traditional beliefs, or turn to new Christian sects. Thus in the *Desya* context, it would seem to speak of reversible "temporal conversions".

5) **The modern quest for bureaucratic identity.** Every Alekh is proud to possess his own 'Identity Card' providing him with a statistical identity within the Mahima Dharma Society (*samaj*) in English, Hindi and Oriya. A quotation of one of the religious passports might illustrate this:

*"Sri Gassi Ram Bhakta<sup>25</sup> is devotee in our Kaupin Dhari Mahima Samaj. After observing his pure character the Samaj issued this Identity Card in favour of him.*

*The person not possessing this Card shall not be taken as a Member of this Samaj. So the Samaj shall not be held responsible for any anti-religious activities of such persons having no Identity Card.*

*The president of this Samaj reserves all the rights to take disciplinary actions as determined by the Samaj against the Identity Card Holders who will intrigue the Rules, Regulations and Sanctity of this Religion.*

*Annual Subscription Rs. 25"*

By paying their dues to the religious centre in Joranda, Alekhs gain rights and duties within the institution and thus develop a new corporate religious identity. But they can also be sanctioned by the authorities if they violate religious law. The religious centre in Joranda thus represents a juridical entity for the devotees.

The great importance attached to the issuing and possessing of the "Identity Card" indicates a move toward institutionalisation within what was initially a reformist religious movement<sup>26</sup>. On the other hand Alekh identity expresses a degree of opposition towards bureaucratic terms of the Indian administration. Alekhs refuse to classify themselves as "Adivasi"<sup>27</sup>. They are "Alekhs" and proud of it. The official written proof that one is a Member of the Hindu Mahima Dharma society (*samaj*) in Dhenkanal gives the Cardholder a moral dignity and legal identity<sup>28</sup>. As such, Alekhs resist being categorised by the Indian administration. Within the current administrative terminology, Alekhs become their own agents and construct their own administrative and social identity.

## **Conclusion**

The Alekh religion can be regarded as a local tradition within the recent religious traditions Mahima Dharma. "Centre" and "periphery" relate to each other through a

new polysemic code of religious identity. Locally, the *gerua*-clothes of the Alekhs symbolise identification with the traditional *Desya*-cosmos; in larger context the colour of their clothes and their specific diet place them within the prestigious Hindu-code of asceticism. The Alekh religion, as M. Carrin-Bouez's (1991) title hints at, is an indigenous *Desya* "response to acculturation".

Acculturation, in terms of Herskovits (1964: 170), is seen as a dynamic creative process of cultural change implying borrowing new cultural elements and combining them with common traditional values. Alekh tradition in Koraput, which I have claimed to be a new tradition of "Aleksh-shamanism", is to be seen as a cultural *bricolage*<sup>29</sup>. A bricolage is the creative making of tradition. It implies putting together and taking apart cultural elements in order to work on something new. The creativity of local culture implies the active reception of the own and of the other tradition. It implies adopting new ideas, combining them with old ones and criticising the common ones. An Alekh reinterpretation of the own culture can be seen in terms of an indigenous critique upon the consumption of alcohol and meat. The cultural quilt of external and internal motives creates a new religiosity and religious identity of the Alekhs. Protagonists of this cultural change are the Alekh-shamans (*gurumai*). I was told and could observe many moments when suddenly "god came out of the earth" (*Mapura aila*). God appeared in the form of a stone in one of the *Desya* villages and had chosen an Alekh as the new religious specialist. New ritual places with newly chosen ritual experts appear daily and demonstrate the creative dynamics of the Alekh religion in Koraput.

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<sup>2</sup> For more details see: Eschmann 1975: 9-22.

<sup>3</sup> Das, Devi, and Das, N. 1968/69, 43-76.

<sup>4</sup> See Senapati & Kuanr 1971, 19. The amount of the total population of Koraput is 20,06,772.

<sup>5</sup> see Eschmann 1986 (1978): 374-410.

<sup>6</sup> I use the term "invention of tradition" not in its original sense derived from E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger in *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). 'Tradition' in Hobsbawm's terms refers to modern "inventions" of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century postulating an unchanged continuity to a constructed past. 'Invented traditions' claim to be of ancient origin, but are instead very recent in origin, as for instance modern ceremonies in British Academies or ceremonies associated with the Cup Final in British Association Football (1983:1). 'Invented Tradition' as a "set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of ritual or symbolic nature, which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past"(1) are seen to be "invariant" (1983: 2). The invariance differentiates 'tradition', invented or not, from 'custom' (2). " 'Custom' ... does not preclude innovation and change. 'Custom' (...) can not afford to be invariant" (ibid). In this sense 'invented traditions' are understood as "neo traditionalist practices" (12) associated with the nation-making processes of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The invention of religious tradition in my terms means a creative process within local beliefs and practices which amalgamates new concepts with old ones.

<sup>7</sup> For more details see: Guzy 2000, 323-330.

<sup>8</sup> For this see: Deo 1999, 137-151.



<sup>9</sup> Concerning the feature of polycentrality in Mahima Dharma see especially the work of Beltz, J. 2001. "Disputed Centres, Rejected Norms and Contested Authorities. Situating Mahima Dharma in its Regional Diversity", paper given during the Annual DFG-Salzau-conference Mai 2001.

<sup>10</sup> Kakar 1984/[1982], 92-121. In reference to the crucial work of Lévi Strauss on „the effectiveness of symbols“, Kakar classifies local Indian healing specialists as shamans. They in terms of Lévi Strauss give a symbolic language to their suffering clients (1962: 94). Kakar descriptions of the therapeutic and ritual specialists of the Oraon tribe (95-111) agrees with my own ethnographic observations within the Alekhs of the Desya Complex.

<sup>11</sup> Vitebsky 1993; 1995.

<sup>12</sup> Atkinson 1992, 307-330. Atkinson refers in her review article to the different topics within the scholarly constructed models of 'shamanism'. Aware of the critics concerning the western category, she postulates for exchanging it with its plural form "shamanisms", "in favour of close scrutiny of local practices embedded in particular historical, cultural, and social contexts" (p. 321). In order to cultivate interdisciplinary dialogues apart from local ethnographic results, Atkinson argues for preserving the studies on shamanisms.

<sup>13</sup> At least five "official" *tirtha* 1) Joranda 2) Kamakhianagar 3) Angarabanda 4) Jaka 5) Barambur. Besides these, Khaliapalli is of greatest importance as the holy place of Bhima Bhoi.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'ecstasy' derives from the greek origin *ekstasis*, which can be traduced as an alienation from the external reality. In reference to psychoanalytical and sociological approaches Zinser gives an introduction to the various definitions of ecstasy as "abnormal" or "altered state of consciousness" in his article (Zinser 1988, 274-284).

<sup>15</sup> Pfeffer 2000, 331-346.

<sup>16</sup> See: Keane 1997, 47-71

<sup>17</sup> Common meta-term derived from the works of I.M. Lewis 1971, *Ecstatic Religion*, Harmonworth; E. Bourguignon (ed.) (1973): *Religion. Altered States-of-Consciousness and Social Change*, Columbus (Ohio).

<sup>18</sup> The Desya word "mai" is a polysemic term meaning at the same time "mother", "wife", "bride" and "woman".

<sup>19</sup> See: Schimmel, 1975. The sufi mystic is living a love relationship with God. It is said that he is performing the feminine role of behaviour (serving, devotion, emotion).

<sup>20</sup> For the broad topic of *bhakti* as the medieval tradition of Hindu devotion see for instance Gonda 1977; Biardeau 1994.

<sup>21</sup> Term borrowed from the work of Mauss 1923-24.

<sup>22</sup> For more details see: Otten 2000, 347-356.

<sup>23</sup> Herskovits 1964, 165-181.

<sup>24</sup> See: Pfeffer 1982.

<sup>25</sup> name changed.

<sup>26</sup> I. B. Dube is also observing the same processes, see: Dube 1999, 98-125; *ibid* 2001, 149-178.

<sup>27</sup> Common term for non-Hindu indigenous populations that in classical Hindu categories is considered as not belonging to the caste-system and is considered to be of lowest status. Generally Adivasi implicates a pejorative connotation such as "primitive", "without culture".

<sup>28</sup> The article of Lund 2001, 3-24 can be seen as an inspiring paper towards anthropological investigations on the relationship between personal documents, bureaucratic space and the modern construction of national identity.

<sup>29</sup> Term borrowed from Lévi-Strauss 1962, Chap. I.

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# Industrialisation in a 'tribal zone'

## The Desia of Koraput and a Hydro-electric Power Plant

Christian Strümpell

**ABSTRACT:** This paper deals with industrialisation in a tribal region in South Orissa. It wants to examine the interrelations between the system of value-ideas of the indigenous population and their strategies to adopt to the new situation.

The first section presents a brief introduction of the different Desia categories, focusing on the relationships between patrons and clients. The second one introduces the industrial settlement and the situation of the Desia living in it. The last part relates the choices of government compensation to the socio-cosmic order of Desia society.

### Introduction

In this article I will discuss strategies of different parts of a 'tribal society' to adopt to industrialisation. Following Pfeffer, I use the expression 'tribal society' to denote the indigenous population of highland Orissa, irrespective of their administrative classification as either *Scheduled Tribes*, *Scheduled Castes* or *Other Backward Classes* (s. *ibid.* 2002). The 'tribal society' concerned is the society of the Desia of the Koraput District in Orissa. Large-scale industrialisation took place in this area shortly after India gained independence in 1947. In the course of the construction of a hydro-electric project a substantial amount of land was nationalised. The tribals who were affected by nationalisation was given compensation in the form of either money or new land somewhere else or permanent employment in the hydro-electric project. The different categories making up Desia society made different choices upon which kind of compensation to take. I will argue that an understanding of the different choices can only be achieved by relating them to the system of value-ideas of Desia society.

In the first section of this article, therefore, a brief description of the social structure and the value-ideas upon which it rests will be given. Due to the fact that I did not conduct field research focusing on Desia society, this description will be based upon recent articles by Pfeffer (1997) and Berger (2001). In the second section follows an account of the hydro-electric project, its settlement and the situation of the Desia staying in it. The third and concluding part deals with the choice of compensation the different categories of Desia have made and their linkage to the system of value-ideas of that particular tribal society.

Due to the fact that my ethnographic research<sup>1</sup> until now focused mainly upon the project's workforce originating from the coastal plains of Orissa and Andhra Pradesh, my field data concerning the Desia staying within and nearby the industrial settlement are limited. So this paper can only be regarded as a preliminary attempt to

scrutinise the interrelationships between different parts of a tribal society and the process of industrialisation.

### **Desia society**

The society of indigenous people of the Koraput District, Orissa is called Desia society, literally, the society of the 'country people'. It is the society of the former kingdom of Jeypore. Like in all other parts of India the categories making up Desia society are classified by the Indian administration as either *Scheduled Tribes* (ST) or *Scheduled Castes* (SC), i.e. petty hawkers and artisans, or *Other Backward Classes* (OBC), i.e. people who are ritually superior to the ST, but culturally not different (s. Pfeffer 2002). In the past research has been conducted almost exclusively on the categories classified as *Scheduled Tribes*, virtually excluding their interrelationships with *Scheduled Castes* and *Other Backward Classes* (s. Pfeffer 1997; Berger 2001).

As Pfeffer and Berger point out, it is crucial for the understanding of Desia society to take into account these interrelationships. Excluding these will result in taking a part of tribal society for the whole.

Let me briefly summarise the social structure and the system of value-ideas of Desia society. All categories of Desia society have a patrilineal kinship system with patrilocal rule of residence and the same clan names occur in all categories to differentiate between agnates and affines. The total number of clans ("*bonso*") is eight, but only Dombo, Sundi and Rona use all categories, the other Desia using less than that (s. Berger 2001 and footnote 3). All Desia differentiate between cross- and parallel cousins and practise symmetric exchange (s. *ibid.*). They share furthermore "a common life-style, wear the same dress, build their houses in the same style, believe in the same gods and spirits and participate in the same festivals" (*ibid.*). But according to Pfeffer and Berger, this unity does not imply equality among the different social categories of Desia society. The social relationships within Desia society are hierarchic, but the hierarchy in Koraput is of a different type than the one prevailing in caste society of coastal Orissa. Whereas "the *varna* model is the frame of reference for all castes of the coastal area, it cannot be discovered in the tribal hills at all. No estate of intellectual ritualists is opposed to the holders of secular power or segregated from the general peasant community" (Pfeffer 1997:11). The terms expressing status differences are also not the same as those of caste society. Status differences are expressed in the idiom of seniority ordering the different Desia categories internally into senior (*boro*) and junior (*sano*) sub-tribes and externally into senior and junior tribes.

Actually, according to Berger, two different levels of hierarchical relationships occur in Koraput. On one level, which Berger calls the "trans-village" or general level, Desia society has a tripartite structure. On top of the hierarchy on the general level are all those categories of Desia wearing the sacred thread ("*poita*") and the *tulsi*-necklace. These are the Rona, i.e. the former militia of the zamindar of Jeypore, the Kumar, i.e. the potters, Goudo, i.e. herdsman, and the Mali and Sundi, the gardeners and liquor distillers respectively (s. *ibid.* 2001). At the bottom end we find the SC of Dombo, Ghasia, Gorua and Koli. All the ST, which are also referred to as Roit or Adibasi indicating their status as original inhabitants and landlords, rank

between these two poles. This general hierarchical order can be observed from the rules and norms of intermarriage and commensality. No one of a higher status would accept food from those with a lower status and marriage is only to occur within a status category.

Concerning intermarriage and interdining this order is also effective on the local or village level, but in addition to that a different order emerges. The village is for the Desia the most sacred entity. The fertility and well-being of the soil and all living beings of a village depend upon the right performance of sacrificial offerings to the gods (s. *ibid.*). For the conduction of these sacrificial offerings a sacrificer or *Pujari* and a ritual cook or *Randari* is needed. Both, *Pujari* and *Randari*, have to belong to the clan ("*bonso*") of the social category of Desia who founded the village. The latter are almost exclusively the so called ST, i.e. Gadaba, Dora, Jhodia and Diday. They founded the village, cultivated the land first and therefore have a special relationship with the earth goddess. Pfeffer calls the agnates of village founders the "communicators with the divine" as opposed to the "communicators with human beings", i.e. all other categories settling in a village (s. *ibid.* 1997:13). The latter ones Pfeffer labels "communicators with human beings", because they act primarily as businessmen. The tribal hills have never been economically self-sufficient and thus depended to some extent on trade with the plains (s. *ibid.*:9). In such trade the SC, and among them mainly the Dombo, have been and still are engaged. Trade is like crafts considered by the Roit as polluting, because both mean to work for somebody else (s. *ibid.*:10).

The opposition between the "communicators with the divine" and the "communicators with human beings" is hierarchic in Dumont's sense. In the course of the village sacrifices the agnates, i.e. the "communicators with the divine" present the whole village and thus encompass their contrary, the "non-ST" Desia of that village (s. Berger 2001). In relation to the latter the former have a higher ritual status, because only a *Pujari* and a *Randari* of the original founders can perform the *puja*. In relation to the latter the former are *boro*.

This means that whereas on the trans-village level the ST rank between the Desia categories wearing *poita* and *tulsi*-necklace and the SC, on the village level they have the highest status, irrespective of the trans-village status of their co-inhabitants.

The only exception to this rule is the Rona tribe. As already mentioned, the Rona had a special relationship to the zamindar in Jeypore, due to their service as soldiers and tax-collectors (*mutadar*). For that service the zamindar sometimes provided them with land, so that they consider themselves also as Roit as the ST do.

However, it is important to note that even when nowadays also other "non-ST" Desia become legal owners of land, the *Pujari* and the *Randari* of the original ST owners still must perform special sacrifices to appease the goddess. She is regarded as the real owner of all land and if anybody would try to cultivate it without being a "communicator with the divine", she would refuse to provide fertility (s. Pfeffer 1997:9).

## The industrial settlement

In the following section will be given a description of an industrial settlement in the Koraput District. In this settlement, which I will call Chatamput, Desia live side by side with industrial workmen and their families since a few decades. The workmen and other inhabitants, mostly small-scale businessmen, arrived in that region almost fifty years back at the time, when the power plant and its settlement were constructed. The construction was finished in the mid-fifties and since then the power plant provides electricity for Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. The vast majority of workmen and other settlers originate also from Orissa and Andhra and more concrete from the Gunjam and Srikakulam Districts in the respective states. Other settlers from outside Koraput come from Kerala and Nepal. Only a small portion of settlers are Muslim and Christians, 2.5% and 5% respectively, with all others being Hindu. They belong to all kinds of castes from Brahmins to *Scheduled Castes* of coastal Orissa and Andhra such as Haddi and Kandara.

For the families of project employees the project provides a lot of facilities. They are given shelter in project quarters for which they do not have to pay rent, nearly all of these quarters are equipped with flowing water and electricity for which the employees also do not have to pay a fee and finally they get medical treatment in the project's hospital without charge. These facilities are only provided for project employees with a permanent contract and for other inhabitants having the status of government servants such as postal or bank staff or school teachers, i.e. those working in the formal sector. Everybody who retires and has not been able to provide his son with an employment in the project, has to vacate his quarter and loses free access to the above mentioned facilities. In contrast to the project employees, those workers being engaged by the project on the basis on daily wages only, i.e. those working in the informal sector, do not have any allowance for these facilities. Due to all these advantages everybody in the settlement tries to get an employment in the project or to get a different kind of government job.

But although an increasing number of inhabitants face economic problems due to a reduction of the total number of employees, the settlement is described by its inhabitants as a place of harmony and indeed, it is not affected by communal or caste conflicts. This feature of social life in industrial settlements is not confined to Chatamput. Parry describes the social life in an industrial settlement in Chattisgarh in a similar way (s. *ibid.* 2000). Communal or caste conflicts virtually never arose there. The only latent conflict in the settlement in Chattisgarh is between the Chattisgarhi and the 'foreigners', i.e. those who came from different regions of India in order to get government jobs (s. *ibid.*). A similar conflict is held in Chatamput between the Desia and the settlers in general, but also between Oriya and Telugu. The Desia complain that jobs in the project, electricity and flowing water were promised to them when the project started, but that of all these promises none has come true. The Oriya on a different matter, but in a similar way complain that the administration of the project is in the hands of Andhra Pradesh Government and that therefore the Telugu are privileged when it comes to promotion or filling vacant positions in the project. The latter conflict broke out publicly only once in the beginning of the fifties when the permanent contracts were distributed among the workmen on the construction site. In contrast to that the conflict between Desia and settlers as far as I know never broke out.

## The Desia of Chatamput: Before nationalisation

Before nationalisation and the construction of the industrial settlement Chatamput was according to all Desia informants of the settlement a Gadaba village. They founded the village and thereby are - according to the socio-cosmic order of Desia society as described in the first section - the "communicators with the divine" in Chatamput. Other inhabitants of Chatamput were the Dora and the Rona as well as two Goudo families. Although the Dombo were not mentioned by anybody, I assume that some families at least might have stayed there also, because some tasks in a Desia village can only be fulfilled by them. They play the music during marriage and death rituals, during sacrifices of the village to its gods and during the dancing events, which all Desia perform in the same style (s. Berger 2001; Pfeffer 1997). Furthermore, the secular office of *Barik* is always held by a Dombo. The *Barik* and the *Naik*, the formal head of the village, who always belongs to the category of ST who founded the village, have to be consulted in all village affairs. In addition to that, the *Barik*'s task consists also of delivering messages inside and outside the village and to collect the contributions of all households for the village's rituals (s. Berger 2001).

However, it is difficult to reconstruct who exactly have been the former inhabitants of Chatamput and where exactly they have stayed, because one has to rely upon the memory of the few Desia who were at that time old enough to remember it in detail today.

The former Desia village Chatamput extended over half of the size of the industrial settlement and was sparsely populated. There have been three distinct sites of the village, so they say. The former site of Chatamput proper was situated at the centre of the modern settlement. There has been another site called Matamguda at what is now the entrance of the settlement half a mile away from its centre. These two sites were populated throughout the year. A third site to where the Desia only shifted during harvest time, was situated also half a mile away from Chatamput but in the opposite direction. These three former village sites nowadays form three of the settlements five *sahi*, but their visual appearance must have changed a lot. Where there were mud houses and narrow pathways before, nowadays one encounters broad cemented streets capable of bearing trucks, lined up by modern project quarters connected by an extensive net of electrical wires.

The old Desia in Chatamput disagree upon who was the *mutadar* (tax-collector) of their village. According to some it was Kesebo Patro from Badigal, according to others it was Padonam Majhi from Jayantigiri. However, both of these *muthadar* were Rona and had an affinal relationship to one Rona family of Chatamput.

## After nationalisation

As already mentioned above, for the construction of the power plant and its settlement a huge area of land was nationalised and the Desia formerly settling on and cultivating the land have been given compensation in the form of either money



or land in the region of Chittrakonda 50 miles away or an employment in the project. Nowadays the whole settlement numbers 568 households and out of these 184 are Desia households. According to the different categories of Desia households split up as given in the table below.

Table 1

Category	Households	Project employees
Gadaba	31	2
Rona	26	2
Dora	9	0
Goudo	9	2
Dombo	64	25
Chandal	3	0
Sundi	2	1
Mali	2	0
Diday	1	0
Jhodia	37	13

Among the above listed Desia only the Dombo reside in all five *sahi* of the settlement. The other categories forming a substantial part of the settlement's Desia population reside in 'tribal enclaves'. The majority settles in Desia-Gudapada, a residential area situated next to the quarters of middle-cadre project employees such as foremen and switch-board operators. With its mud houses and narrow paths it looks like a typical Desia village and as such appears as a sharp contrast to the project quarters made of tin and stone. The other 'tribal enclaves' such as Jhodia Line and Dhepguda Hut are much smaller than Desia-Gudapada, but reveal the same characteristics.

As table 1 shows only 45 Desia work as government servants in the hydroelectric project, the total number of employees being around 350. Virtually all of them occupy low cadre positions in the project. They work as helpers or sweepers, only a handful being high cadre employees such as mechanics or switch board operators.

It is therefore not surprising that the majority of settlers do not consider them as a part of their industrial society, even although they form more than one third of the settlement's population and although many of them are engaged by the projects authority as daily wagers.

The figures also reveal that of those Desia categories settling in Chatamput before nationalisation only a marginal portion occupies government jobs. In contrast to that, more one third of the Jhodia, who were not staying in Chatamput before, and nearly half of the Dombo, of whom only a few families are supposed to have stayed in the old Desia village, are working for the project on the basis of a permanent contract.

I do not know about all the individual decisions on the type of compensation, the Desia of the former village Chatamput have made. As far as know, the Gadaba or at least a substantial part of them decided to take land in Chittrakonda as

compensation. Only a few of them are staying there until today. Most of them have been coming back after a short while. The soil in Chittrakonda was not of good quality and many of them have been struck by malaria and other diseases, so they say. According to them the reason for their unsuccessful trip to Chittrakonda lies in the fact that they left their *hundi*, the shrine of the village goddess, behind them in Chatamput.

However, nowadays some of the Gadaba regret that they abandoned so quickly their attempt to settle in Chittrakonda. According to them, the few Gadaba of Chatamput who remained in Chittrakonda are nowadays much better off than those in the settlement. The ones returning to their old village lost all rights for further compensation and now do not possess sufficient land and cattle to provide themselves with sufficient means of livelihood. They say that the crop from their fields lasts for only five to six months. For the rest of the year they have to engage in daily wage labour for the project and its employees. Furthermore, the small fields the Gadaba of Chatamput possess nowadays are not situated in the vicinity of their residential area, but some miles further away. The Gadaba, so to say, turned from landlords of a Desia village into virtually landless suburbians of an industrial settlement. Nevertheless, although they lost nearly all their land, the Gadaba are still considered as the "communicators with the divine" among the Desia of Chatamput. The *Pujari* performing sacrificial offerings at the village shrine is still a Gadaba and as far as I know almost all Desia of Chatamput contribute to these offerings.

This is in accordance with Pfeffer's statement concerning the ritual dimension of land acquisition. The goddess is regarded as the landowner and only those being indebted to provide her with sacrificial offerings, i.e. the "communicators with the divine", can cultivate the land without provoking the anger of the goddess. Any form of "subletting" among humans does not change this order. Therefore, only a *Pujari* of the goddess' original partners can provide her with sacrifices (s. *ibid.* 1997:9).

The scarcity of land the returning Gadaba encountered was not only due to nationalisation. It is also a result of the Rona's activity. According to the Desia of Chatamput, a short time before nationalisation took place, the Rona and especially the Rona family having affinal ties with the old *muthadar*, acquired land close to Desia-Gudapada. It is said, that the above mentioned Rona family knew about the government plans to nationalise the area on which Chatamput and its fields have been situated, before all others got to know about them. After they knew about the plans, the Gadaba and Dora of Chatamput say, that Rona family together with a few other Rona started to purchase fields at the outer boundary of the old village site, which were regarded as being not so attractive by the former field owners, i.e. the Gadaba. This led to the situation that, since the land of Chatamput was nationalised, this particular Rona family is the only one among the former inhabitants, who own sufficient land. It is the only family of Chatamput's former inhabitants that does not need to engage itself in daily wage labour.

Until now I do not know what kind of compensation the two Goudo families staying in Chatamput have chosen and whether they are still staying there or moved away. Of the Dora some remained in Chatamput. They only shifted to Desia-Gudapada, where most Desia living in the settlement are staying. These Dora own no land at all. They remained in Chatamput after the project started, because of the higher chances

of getting employed as contract labourer. Other Dora took money as compensation for nationalised land. These Dora founded a new village in the vicinity of Chatamput's former village site Matamguda. They are proud that they still are cultivators and do not need to engage in daily wage labour as their former fellow-villagers have to.

### **Patrons and clients and the process of industrialisation**

Looking at the different strategies how to compensate for the loss of land in the course of nationalisation, the question remains why nearly none of the Gadaba, Dora and Rona of Chatamput opted for an employment in the hydro-electric project. Due to the fact that a substantial part of the Dombo and also Jhodia became government servants, a chance must have existed, even if it was rather slim. Concerning Chattisgarh, Parry describes a similar situation. At the time when the Bhilai Steel Plant (BSP) came into being, the majority of its workforce were recruited among outsiders. According to him this feature is partly due to the fact that very few locals had industrial skill and is partly based upon the reluctance of the vast majority of locals to accept the jobs on offer (s. *ibid.* 1999b:113). Their consumption needs were limited and they saw therefore no reason to join the BSP. Those of the locals still having land after nationalisation preferred to cultivate it and those who had received money as compensation preferred to eat and drink and did not care too much about the future.

Another reason for their refusal was according to Parry their suspicion that human sacrifices would be conducted at the construction site. They believed that "new recruits were being set to work and then surreptitiously thrown into the foundations to make them bear the weight of such massive buildings, or into the furnaces to make them function" (s. *ibid.*). And due to the high mortality rate at the construction site, they felt that their suspicions were justified.

Their reluctance came to an end after completion of the BSP. The mortality rate decreased rapidly as the most dangerous part of work for the BSP was over and the locals saw the advantages of earning a BSP salary. Then an active market in land requisition certificates developed, because at the time when the State Government compulsorily purchased the land on which the BSP was to be build, it issued certificates of entitlement for employment to all those households who lost their fields (s. *ibid.*:112). This policy was still in force when the construction of the BSP was completed and additional land was to be requisitioned for the rail link to the mines. And in the course of this governmental land acquisition a more substantial part of locals have been able to join the BSP.

Unfortunately, there is no space to discuss Parry's analysis at a more considerable length. Maybe the high portion of Jhodia and Dombo project employees results from a market in land requisition certificates in Chatamput. But this so far has to remain a hypothesis. By now I did not conduct any interviews on the question why the Desia for the most part have been reluctant to work for the project and why only among the Jhodia and Dombo a substantial portion of employees have been recruited. But even if that was the case, the question remains why the other Desia did not gain a project employment via a land requisition certificate.

I assume that the reasons Parry gives for the reluctance of Chattisgarhi to work for the BSP could also hold true for the Desia of Chatamput. Consumption needs were little in Desia villages at that time also. Furthermore, the Gadaba emigrating to Assam for working in tea plantations have been convinced that human sacrifices were conducted there<sup>1</sup>, so they also might have been suspicious of human sacrifices taking place at the project's construction site.

In addition to that I want to suggest another reason for the Desia's refusal to join the industrial society emerging in such proximity to them.

As described in the first section of this article, according to Pfeffer and Berger, the landlords occupy the highest ritual status in a Desia village. In the context of village rituals they encompass all other inhabitants of the village engaging in different kinds of work, especially crafts and trade, which are regarded as polluting and degrading affairs. (see above). The hierarchical opposition between landlords and other villagers results from their different relationship towards the whole. Whereas the former "communicate with the divine", the latter "communicate with human beings".

The former landlords of Chatamput are the Gadaba. They tried to preserve their status as landlords and cultivators by founding a new village somewhere else. The Rona of Chatamput used their knowledge of the government plans to become dominant landowners in the Desia part of the settlement. Some Dora of the former village took money from the government as compensation, but only with the intention to found a village of their own nearby. In all these cases the intention of the Desia was to remain or become landlords, i.e. "communicators with the divine".

The only exception to this pattern are the Jhodia and the Dombo.

The Dombo staying in the settlement come from villages all over Koraput, nearby villages as well as those in vicinity of the District's two towns, Jeypore and Koraput. In contrast to the Gadaba, Dora and Rona the Dombo never have been landlords. So they did not put at risk a high ritual status by joining the hydro-electric project as the other Desia would have. They always worked for others, "communicated with human beings" and so they do also now after industrialisation. The Dombo working for the project did not lose anything. In relation to the other Desia their ritual status remained the same. Nobody of the Gadaba, Dora and Rona intermarries or interdinnes with them. But they enhanced their economic position to a considerable extent by joining the project. They have free access to all project facilities and are thereby much better off than all other Desia. That is also the reason why almost all Dombo put the positive aspects to the fore when talking about the project, whereas according to the Gadaba, Dora and Rona all evil started with the project's installation<sup>3</sup>.

The case of the Jhodia is different. They are tribal landlords, but in the vicinity of Chatamput no Jhodia villages exist. Those staying in the settlement came from a region 50 miles away from Chatamput during construction time. The reason why they left their former villages is not known to me yet. But due to whatever reason, since they abandoned their villages and fields they depend upon daily wage labour

for which they found good opportunities at the construction site of the hydro-electric project. They are furthermore ritually not integrated into the settlement's Desia community. They do not attend the *puja* at the goddess shrine in Desi-Gudapada as most of the other Desia living in the settlement do, but in a nearby Gadaba village<sup>4</sup>.

### **Conclusion and Outlook:**

From the above presented material I will draw the following conclusion. Both the reluctance to join the process of industrialisation as well as the adoption to it by parts of Desia society are only explicable when one considers them in the light of the hierarchic system of value-ideas pertaining in Desia society. Those who are regarded as Roit, like the Gadaba, Dora and Rona of Chatamput tried to preserve their high ritual status. Their strategies were supposed to lead to the foundation of new villages as in the case of the Gadaba and some of the Dora or to a domination of an already existing one, as in the case of the Rona.

In contrast to that the Dombo could not lose their status by joining the project. They were never landlords and were always engaged in polluting work "others". I assume that this is the reason why the Dombo have been less reluctant to join the project's workforce.

The Jhodia present a special case in that constellation, because unlike the Dombo they belong to the Roit, the landlords. But I assume that they lost their status by leaving their villages and turning into migrant labourers. The Jhodia staying in the settlement never had any other possibility than to put all efforts in being recruited for the project's workforce.

As already said in the introduction, my field material concerning the Desia living in and nearby the settlement is until now rather limited. Further research has to be conducted especially on two topics.

First, the interrelationships between Desia employees and Desia non-employees have to be scrutinised. In what ways differs the relationship between two Dombo employees from the relationship between a Dombo employee and a non-employee? Among the Dombo project employees there is for example a considerably higher percentage of Christians than among the non-employed Dombo. Furthermore, I frequently encountered examples of Desia project employees cutting off all ties from the rest of their families as soon as employment has been given to them. This leads to the question whether in addition to the general and local hierarchical order of Desia society, another order emerges based upon employment in the formal sector.

Secondly, the interrelationship between the settlers from the coastal plains and the Desia residing inside the settlement and in the nearby villages have to be analysed. A considerable number of project employees, especially of those settling in Chatamput since construction began, are married to Desia women. Among these settlers some are also of high castes such as Sarua and Halua Brahmins. The problems they face when it comes to the marriage of their children they sometimes solve by marrying them to the offspring of the other Brahmin-Desia families of the settlement. The question is whether a new mixed caste-tribal society is emerging in

the context of the industrial settlement or whether these phenomena are just peripheral? These questions can only be answered by further field research which will be conducted in the near future.

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<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork has been done from March until June 2000 and from September 2000 until March 2001 financed by the German Research Foundation (DFG). Further research will be soon conducted in the same area. The main research focus is on the industrial settlement as a „Mini-India“, where social categories from all over India are confronted with each other.

<sup>2</sup> This I got to know recently by a personal communication with Peter Berger, who conducted long-term field research among the Gadaba of Koraput

<sup>3</sup> This feature is comparable to the one Pinney (1999) describes concerning factories involved in viscose rayon processing in Nagda, Madhya Pradesh. The landed high castes associate the factories with a chaotic and immoral order whereas the land-poor low castes regard the work in factories as a liberation from the subservience and repression of the rural order (s. *ibid.*).

<sup>4</sup> For this I do not know the reason yet, but I would like to offer a preliminary hypothesis. The nearby Gadaba village is virtually not affected by the process of industrialisation, taking place in Chatamput since more than 50 years. The Gadaba still own the land and are the „communicators with the divine“ for the other inhabitants. The latter holds also true for Chatamput, because the *Pujari* is still a Gadaba. The difference is that the Gadaba in the settlement have to engage in *coolie kamo*, i.e. daily wage labour, to feed their families. But as described in the first section of the article, work for others is regarded by the Desia as a polluting affair. Thus, maybe the reason why the Jhoria refuse to participate at the Desia-Gudapada *puja* lies in the fact that the Gadaba as „communicators with the divine“ have not been able to preserve their status as landowners and are now forced to engage in that kind of polluting work.

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# Changing Annual Hunting Festival, Chaitra Parba An Outsider's View

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Those who travel the roads of the Koraput District during two weeks of the month of Chaitra (March/April) need to have a lot of time. During that season, women, young girls and small children raise roadblocks near their villages, sometimes not farther than twenty metres away from each other.<sup>1</sup> All vehicles, bicycles, motorcycles, jeeps and buses are stopped, and the roadblocks made of stones or a turnpike-like wooden pole will only be removed if the traveller pays a few rupees to the road-blocking group.<sup>2</sup> Often, but not always, a *tika* will be given as a kind of welcome and blessing: the driver receives a mark on his forehead which is made of grains of uncooked rice, and a string of flowers is tied to his vehicle. Then the driver may continue his journey up to the next block.

Everywhere in the old Koraput District a trip is similarly troublesome during the said two weeks of Chaitra. But while in the area around Nabarangapur the obstructions to the traffic are still tolerable for those who have a lot of patience, the roadblocks concentrated around the towns of Koraput, Jeypore, Sunabeda and Nandapur bring the traffic to a virtual standstill.<sup>3</sup>

It is the people who are being driven off the road by motor vehicles during the rest of the year who make these Road blockings. The time of Chaitra Parba thus brings about a reversal of the normal situation on the road, and, speaking a bit euphemistically, also of normal power relations. For the outsider, these roadblocks are the most conspicuous sign of the Chaitra Parba festival. In this article I will present a brief outline of the social set up of the Koraput District while laying special emphasis on the hunting festival itself. In doing so I am taking up an idea put forward by E. Ardener who, in a different context, has written in the same way about social space and its underlying structure which becomes visible in physical space:

“World structures are located in physical space, and in real aggregates of human beings. It should not be surprising that the extension of the physical space, and of the experience of those beings, produces a genuine extension of the structure, with all its co-ordinates in language and thought.” (Ardener 1989: 145)

The custom to block the roads (*pojer chekba*) in these two weeks is a part of the annual hunting festival of Chaitra Parba. In the District Gazetteers, the depiction of the roadblocks takes up a large part in the description of the festival. Such depictions illustrate very well how the custom has changed over the last sixty years. In the Koraput District Gazetteer of 1941 we find the following lines:

“chaitra festival is purely a festival for the hill people and the Hindus do not participate in it. The whole month of chaitra is celebrated as a holiday. In every village the fun is fast and furious and anyone who passes by, even the police

constable on beat duty, is invited, sometimes forced to join in the dance. Parties of girls hold hands across the main roads and take toll of every passing vehicle. Young men go from village to village singing to the girls and an expert musician can generally rely upon making a conquest in every village he visits. (Bell 1941: 88)

In a similar vein the Koraput District Gazetteer of 1966 describes:

"All motor vehicles are stopped several times on the road by streams of girls who dance and sing across the road. It is only when a few paise are paid that the vehicles are allowed to move. Two paise used to be ample. With the rise in prices this levy may have risen to twenty-five paise. A car going to Koraput from the plains may be stopped a dozen times before reaching Koraput. To witness a tribal dance for a few paise is a very cheap entertainment." (1966: 138)

In the year 2001 the girls do not hold hands across the road any more. Now they have put in a lot of effort to drag heavy logs and stone boulders onto the road. There is also no more dancing on the road for the passing traveller. Instead, one of the young women comes forward to negotiate in a very businesslike manner the amount to be paid as a remuneration for the removal of the obstacle on the road. Usually, they take between one and five rupees, but they never seem to have any change when the exasperated traveller, after having run out of his or her smaller bills, is obliged to produce a larger one. Then the next round of negotiating about the money to be returned in exchange for the larger bill sets in.

One can also observe a change in the social set-up at the roadblocks. As already mentioned, older women and small children are now also busy extracting money from passers-by. In the Jeypore area the seemingly rather lucrative business has attracted young males as well.<sup>4</sup> Exhausting as this custom is for the traveller, it is interesting for the anthropologist to observe, since he or she can gain an insight into the inner structure of the village responsible for the roadblocks. There is no common effort behind the rows of stones and wooden bars, but the social groups represented in the particular settlement have their own block and extract their own toll from the traveller. This explains why there are so many roadblocks throughout the Koraput District.

The societies of Koraput whose members call themselves "Desya" consist of separate groups.<sup>5</sup> The roadblock at the time of the hunting festival Chaitra Parba provides a good opportunity to observe that groups separated by social rank and age seldom mix. Thus, on the one hand, the every-day structure of Desya society keeps intact there, but on the other it is exactly this order of daily life which is being reversed by social actions such as roadblocks during the time of the festival. In the following I will take a look at the changes in the order of the daily life.

The inversion of every-day life in Desya society for the time of the hunting festival is a well-known social phenomenon. Such reversals of social structure at ritual events have been analysed by Arnold van Gennep and later by many others, among them Victor Turner. Van Gennep has worked out the sequence of ritual phases which



constitute the whole ritual event. He has developed these phases for the analysis of life cycle rituals such as initiation rites which are practised in many societies in order to mark the entry into adulthood. But the phases also function as markers for seasonal rituals which structure the yearly cycle of agrarian production. Van Gennep has called such rituals *rites de passage*. They accompany every change of place, state, social position and age (van Gennep in Turner 1969:94). Van Gennep divides these *rites de passage* into three stages: separation, threshold (or limen) and aggregation. In the phase of separation the detachment of the individual or the group is being established. In the second phase the individual or group undergoes a period in which social conditions or the social behaviour is very distinct from the previous modes. In the third phase or aggregation, the extraordinary social conditions of the second period come to an end. After this phase the individual has achieved a new stage or status in a group or in society, or the community has started a new phase of life, such as a new agricultural year. Let us look now at the second state of liminality, which is of central importance for the ritual process. It defines social actions or spaces that are very different from the normal state.

Van Gennep uses his concept to describe units of social space and time in which such behaviour and symbols that govern a society in normal life outside the ritual time and space are disengaged from social norms and in which everyday values are inverted. Thus Arnold van Gennep has not only developed a model for life cycle rituals but also one for the spatial dimension of such rituals. He is therefore able to explain the temporarily altered states of locations which undergo a form of liminality. (Gennep in Turner 1969: 166). The roadblocks in Chaitra Parba described above are such places in the state of liminality, and liminality is the central aspect of time in the ritual. The entire social structure of Desya society undergoes this phase of liminality. In Turners words:

"if liminality is regarded as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action, it can be seen as potentially a period of scrutinisation of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs." (Turner 1969: 167)

Let us consider the state of liminality a little bit more. Turner found that in the state of liminality some societies alter their social structure for a limited time. He describes that societies with a complex structure and "a hierarchical system of politico-legal-economic positions with many types of evaluation, separating men in terms of 'more' or 'less'" (Turner 1969: 96) in rituals often undergo a period of liminality where the structure of the society is rudimentary or undifferentiated, or where members of unequal rank for a limited period become equals. He calls this social relationship *communitas* (Turner 1969: 96). In addition to the emergence of *communitas*, members of the society in the phase of liminality can undergo two main types of status alteration. These two types are status elevation and status reversal.

In rituals of status elevation the novice is being conveyed irreversibly from a lower to a higher position in society. In rituals of status reversal groups or categories of persons who habitually occupy low status positions in the social structure are positively enjoined to exercise ritual authority over their superiors; who in their turn

must accept their ritual degradation with good will. These rituals of status reversals are often accompanied by robust verbal and non-verbal behaviour, in which inferiors revile and even physically maltreat superiors. This ritual of status reversal is frequently found in cyclical and calendrical rituals (Turner 1969:167).

Using the example of the Zulus, Turner argues that structural superiors through their dissensions over particularistic or segmental interests have brought disaster on the local community. He sees structural inferiors, often young women who normally obey their fathers or husbands, to represent *communitas* for a limited time to set things right again. They do this by symbolically usurping for a short while the behavioural style of their structural superiors. For him it is significant that "young maidens are often the main protagonists: they have not yet become the mothers of children whose structural positions will once more provide bases for opposition and competition." (Turner 1969:184). Yearly liminal inversions of the everyday social structure eliminate the accumulated sins and sunders of structure (Turner 1969:185).

Life cycle rituals as well as the rituals of the yearly cycle always have an impact on the whole community and are a way to reproduce the social structure exactly because they reverse its rules and norms for a limited period of time.

### **The hunting festival Chaitra Parba**

The people of the Koraput plateau celebrate the festival Chaitra Parba throughout the whole month of chaitra. It is one of their most important festivals. The celebrations are based on the Indian lunar calendar, in which the month of Chaitra begins with the day after the new moon, usually the one following the spring equinox. Chaitra follows the month Phalgun and ends at the new moon before Baisakh. In 2001 Chaitra began on the 26<sup>th</sup> of March and ended on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April.

For the Desya, the whole month of Chaitra is a time of rest from work. The hunting festival of the month Chaitra is very closely linked to the beginning of the agrarian cycle. The heavy work of preparing the fields for the sowing is about to be finished, and during the festival the first seeds of the new year will be ritually sown. It is the beginning of the hot season, the time of the mangoes, which are very much anticipated. The first fruits will be eaten at that time.

The whole month is a time of the hunt.<sup>6</sup> The ritual hunting and the luck in the chase are associated with fertility. Under the signs of the bow and the arrow, the spear and the hunt, only rituals for the goddesses (Hundi, Nisani, Patkanda) and for the hunt can be carried out. At the beginning of the new agrarian cycle, the people of the village have a lot of ritual obligations toward these deities of the Desya pantheon. All other important rituals, such as marriages, major life cycle and healing rituals must not be carried out at this time.

During the hunting festival of Chaitra Parba the unity of the village becomes evident. Inhabitants declare that in these weeks the presence of the gods and the souls of

the ancestors are exceptionally strong. Many people become ill or possessed. Due to this strong divine and ancestral power the whole village is turned into a sacred realm. The village becomes, to use the words of van Gennep, a liminal space in which the community is very closely bound to the divine. As a symbol for the presence of the divine, all visitors receive a welcoming blessing (*tika*) and are asked for a small donation of money upon their entry into the village. This practice is reminiscent of similar rituals in the presence of the deity of a Hindu temple.

We shall now take a closer look at some aspects of the festival Chaitra Parba.<sup>7</sup> Most of the rituals are carried out in the two weeks around chaitra purnima, the full moon day. Each village has its own schedule, and the main division is between those villages that begin their ritual sequence before and those that begin it at the day of the full moon. Performing the rituals before the full moon is called *mangai*, the other timing of the ritual sequence is known as *suati*.

In the village in which we were living and allowed to observe Chaitra Parba in 2001, it was celebrated according to the *suati* sequence which began on Chaitra 15, the 8<sup>th</sup> April. On the Sunday before the sequence started (chaitra 8 / 1<sup>st</sup> April) there was a sacrifice at the shrine of the goddess Patkanda outside the village. In this ritual, the gods were asked to bestow upon the village fertility, good health, a rich harvest and good luck for the hunters. Then two goats were sacrificed and the religious specialists (*pujari*) consumed the first mangoes of the year.

With the beginning of the new agrarian cycle in the month Chaitra the normal village life undergoes a temporary change, which symbolises the transition from the old to the new. During this period, the women have the highest status in the village. They sit on the *sadar*, the stone platform that is normally the meeting place of the men and the ancestors. The men are not allowed to sit there. The girls enjoy riding the swings, which have been constructed for them. At other times the people of Koraput District make swings for those rituals in which people who are possessed by a deity use them. Alfred Gell (1980) has done an extensive analysis of the symbol of the swing in tribal contexts. According to him, the swinging is connected with the experience of an altered state of mind in which a close contact to the gods can be achieved. Letting the girls do the same at the time of Chaitra Parba may also symbolise the closeness of the women to the holy at this time of the year.

Many of the social activities of the following festival week after the full moon have a fixed time and location. Each ritual performance is being done at a previously determined auspicious time. Of equal importance is the auspiciousness of the direction in which the ritual "faces", i.e., the cardinal point toward which the person who performs the ritual turns him/herself. Another important feature is the symbolic connection of the performers to the sacred time and space of the village. The name of the performers must be in accordance with the time of the ritual, the name of the village and the names of the supervising ritual specialists. The ritual specialist (*dissari*), for example, each day selects a boy at the beginning of the daily ritual hunt in this way, who will be pelted with cow dung by an similarly selected girl. The cow

ding is thrown at an auspicious time into the auspicious direction. The harmony of time, space and direction is as important (as?) at the more elaborate rituals.

Here a short description of the main rituals.

At a predetermined time in the evening before the full moon day the women ritually take out (*bion utraiba*) the rice and other grains of the previous autumn harvest from their storage place under the roof of their houses (*maca*). These grains are put into a winnowing basket and are then kept in the sacred room of the house close to the sacred post (*doron deli*). On the day of the festival the village presents itself as a unit to any outsiders, as anybody who visits the village receives a blessing (*tika*) from a woman of high status. Starting this day women and girls go to the roads to stop passing vehicles.

In the morning the two ritual specialists of the goddess Hundi in the village (*pujari*) cook a ritual meal (*tsoru*) near her shrine and ritually eat mangoes. Thereafter, all villagers enjoy the first mangoes of the year. During the day the men make the swings for the girls, and in the evening the seeds that have been taken from the storage loft are offered to the village goddess. At the shrine of the goddess the grains from all the families are put into a single basket. As in the hunting rituals, a boy and a girl have been chosen to represent the community before the goddess. After the goddess accepts the grains, she redistributes (*bion chiniba*) them to the families of the village. The ritual specialists throw the seeds into the air from the shrine, and the villagers catch them with winnowing baskets. Each family then sows the grain they have caught in their garden. Later that night the whole village dances *demsa*.

On the next day, Monday, the whole village is decorated with mango leaves as a sign of the festival Nuakei. Each kinship group of the village - called local line (*kuda*) hereafter - sacrifices a black and brown goat (*koira cheli*) to the village goddess. This is said to be the most important sacrifice of the entire year because it is meant to gain the favour of the goddess and thus to fend off illness, bad harvests and other calamities. This sacrifice is the only one ever performed within the house. Sacrificing the goat in this way is a very sacred and precarious affair. The house of the local line becomes the temple of the goddess for the time of the sacrifice. If the goddess is not satisfied with the ritual, she will be angry and will cause unhappiness for the whole local line. For this reason, no one from outside the kin group is allowed to be present at the sacrifice. At the end of the ritual, two media (*gurumai*) dance in front of the house. It is said that the goddess has accepted the sacrifice and now dances joyfully there. The meat of the goat is then distributed in a ritual way and consumed with new rice.

On the third day (Tuesday) the boys of the age set<sup>8</sup> six to ten set out for the ritual "small hunt" (*tingribet*). They take sticks<sup>9</sup> and go out to catch small game, especially birds, alive. Meanwhile in the village the girls dance *demsa*. The whole day is a time for games and merrymaking. In the evening, after having returned from their hunt, the boys dance around the shrine of the village goddess Hundi and then move dancing to

the houses of the ritual specialists (*dissari*), the house of the village headman (*naik*), and thereafter to other houses of the village where important persons live. The total number of houses visited should be five, seven, nine or eleven. In front of each house the housewife gives them a blessing (*tika*) and a small sum of money as a remuneration.

The first cock's crow on the fourth day is the sign for the first ritual of the "big hunt" (*borobet*): again there is the already mentioned pelting of a boy with dung by a girl. Later in the morning the village musicians (*dombo*) make the rounds and receive some money and a piece of cloth from each household. Then the men leave the village for their hunt. Throughout the day the women dance *demsa*, and some groups go to set up roadblocks. Married and unmarried women as well as members of the different communities of the village do this separately.

In the evening the men come back from their hunt and with them come visitors, mostly young men, from neighbouring villages. If the hunt was not successful, the women sing ribald songs (*tode git*) in which the men are teased and made fun of. Each man can become the target of this mockery, even if he is a respected person the rest of the year. However, the unmarried women keep back with these mockery chants. Outside the village, in the proximity of the shrine of the goddess Patkanda, a *demsa* dance takes place with the boys of the other villages. This dance is wilder than the dances in the village.

After the dance, a hunting ritual called *dal somor* takes place. A girl from the village who has been chosen by a *dissari* from another village takes the role of the game. The girl is covered with leaves of the *dal* tree by the women in the proximity of the shrine of Patkanda to signify that she is an animal in hiding. The women pretend to hunt the girl down under loud shouts such as "we killed boar and stag" (*kotra marlu re somor marlu re*) and bring her back into the village to the shrine of the goddess Hundi.<sup>10</sup>

If the men are successful, however, the ritual takes another form. They do *tirki ogaiba*, a ritual in which the men force the women to go with them to a place outside of the village. There the women must put their hand inside the anus of the animal. This is a sort of revenge for the teasing with which the women have sent the men out of the village in the morning. In any case, after the ritual and during the night mainly the unmarried women and men do the *demsa* dance.

The next morning (Thursday) begins again with the cow dung ritual. This time the boy carries a stick. He leaves the village and goes to the shrine of the goddess Patkanda where he plants the stick and comes back to the village. This ritual could be interpreted as a fertility rite.

Later the men assemble under a tree outside the village. There they perform a ritual for the goddess of the wilderness and the hunt (*Bonodurga*) by sacrificing an egg and shooting arrows. Then the women again sing ribald songs and thus send the men off

on their hunt. The last three days of the week are the days of the hunt. Nobody is allowed to work on the fields and the festivities continue.

In the early morning of the following Sunday the festival ends and the men begin with the ploughing (*holo bahariba*) of their fields. This is also the time when the last roadblock is removed from the vicinity of the village.

### Conclusion

The main theme of the Chaitra Parba festival is fertility. The rituals are performed in order to ensure the reproductive capacities of the whole village. The sowing of seeds, dances, hunts and sacrifices all represent this foremost concern.

The sacrifices, which are an affair of the local lines, symbolise the renovation of their reproductive strength. But besides the village deity and the local lines they implicitly include the whole village, setting a boundary between it and the outside world. But their exclusiveness also reaffirms the demarcating lines between the different status groups within the village. There is no *communitas* in Turner's sense between the communities of the Rona, Gadaba, Mali and Dombo. The emphasis is clearly on the local lines, and in other rituals also to a great extent on the age sets, but with a strong emphasis on the division of the sexes.

There are many aspects to the festival which mark it as a liminal phase in the year: during Chaitra Parba the women are the highest in status; they sing the bawdy songs of the great hunt and chase their male relatives out of the village and make them bring back the game, a symbol of the wilderness and its unfettered fertility. The same purpose is also achieved by the bringing in of the young girl in the mock hunt at the shrine of Patkanda. The status of the women is also expressed by their taking over the village's assembly place, the meeting platform of the men (*sadar*). The women control the access to the village in a symbolic way and also extend their reach onto the road. It is interesting that this extended sphere is not only taken over by the young girls as it was the custom some 40 years ago, but by all the age and status sets - except for the adult males who are busy hunting. In this way, the closing of the village for the time of the festival is being reinforced and extended from the more "private" sphere of the village proper into the much more "public" space of the road.

As we have seen, the ritual contains many instances of status reversal which involve the whole society. This includes the status reversal of men and women, as well as the reversed status of work, because nobody is allowed to do any serious labour during this period. There is also a reversal in the values of places, as is denoted in the liminality of space. The entire village becomes a temple for the goddess, and the road loses its purpose as a domain of mobility and becomes a place of immobility.

The question that arises in this context is: to what extent are the roads a part of the village on the Adivasi's mental map. Numerous rituals in the Koraput area are

performed on the roads. These rituals are conducted to create a temporal sacred space in which deities can be worshipped. One explanation of course is that the rituals are performed on roads that lead to the shrine of a far-away deity, and that setting up the deity's puja on the road gives the participants hope that this deity eventually reaches them.

There remains, however, the question, in which way the roadblocks at Chaitra Parba can be seen as a religious act, and how are they connected with the many other rituals performed on the roads of India.

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<sup>1</sup> In March/April 2001 I observed together with my assistant Sunita Suna the festival of Chaitra Parba as the final series of rituals after several months of field research. I should like to take the opportunity to thank Sunita very much for her collaboration and friendship. I would also like to thank Professor Georg Pfeffer of the Freie Universität Berlin and the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, Bonn, for their advice and funding which enabled me to complete my research.

<sup>2</sup> Temporary roadblocks are widespread in the world. In India as well as in Europe processions at various occasions such as religious festivals, marriages and deaths make roads impassable for a certain time. The remarkable feature of Chaitra Parba is the very long period of two weeks and the custom to extract a kind of toll from the passers-by.

<sup>3</sup> The town of Koraput is the headquarter of the district since the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Jeypore is the residential town of the kingdom of Nandapur/Jeypore, which comprised in pre-British times the whole of the Koraput plateau. The importance of Sunabeda increased after the independence when it became the location of military facilities.

<sup>4</sup> P. Berger, pers. comm.

<sup>5</sup> They are officially classified as Scheduled Tribes (e.g. Gadaba, Kondh, Bhumia), Other Backward Classes (e.g. Rona, Mali, Gouda and Sundi) and Scheduled Castes (Dombo).

<sup>6</sup> Hunting rituals can be found all over the world. Compare for Central Africa McCreehy (1994) and for Indochina Izikowitz (1951).

<sup>7</sup> An extended symbolic analysis of the festival cannot be done here. I refer to the writings of P. Berger who presently writes a Ph. D. thesis on the ritual cycle of the Desya.

<sup>8</sup> The internal organisation of tribal societies is often based on age sets in which rights and obligations are distributed according to age and the principle of seniority. See McDougall (1963) and Gell (1980).

<sup>9</sup> Rahmann (1952) describes this for other hunting rituals in India as well.

<sup>10</sup> See Choudhury (1967) for a similar ritual in 1967 in which the girl had been brought beforehand to the *Naik's* house. Due to the darkness and commotion in which the ritual took place I was unable to see whether they went to the *Naik* first.

In a similar ritual carried out by the Hill Juang McDougall (1963:211) observed the following: "After several days of hunting no animal has been killed by the party, all the married women of the village bathe and assemble in the plaza, in front of the *majang*. The men in the hunting party hand over their bows and arrows to the women. The latter return them to the leader of the party, who distributes them to their owners. As the men are about to depart for the hunt, one of the women pretends to fall down and die. Some of the men beat her gently with branches, saying 'this is a *sambhur* [stag, T.O.], we will have a successful hunt today.' If an animal is killed, the slayer, together with a few other men representing the party, are ceremonially blessed by the village women."

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# Héaling Practices and Mahima Dharma

## A Short Note on Recent Fieldwork in Western Orissa

Johannes Beltz

In the context of my research on Mahima Dharma, I came across many incidents of healing.<sup>1</sup> I was, again and again, told by Mahima Dharmees how they miraculously got cured from snake bites, sickness and divers diseases. It became quite clear that healing was not only a side aspect of this religious movement but a fundamental part. The following note is investigating this interesting phenomenon.

### Introductory remark

In a survey conducted by the Tribal Research Institute in Bhubaneswar and published in 1969, it is reported that 35% of all interviewees had accepted Mahima Dharma in order to be cured from diseases. A. Das, Kiran Fala Devi and N. Das, the authors of the survey, further discovered a strong resistance against traditional methods of healing. They observed that the healing practice of Mahima Dharma is explicitly directed against professional healers, i.e. the *gunia*<sup>2</sup> and the *baidya*<sup>3</sup>. The reasons given by the Mahima Dharmees are reported as follows: people should not consult a *gunia* because he might advise the patient to sacrifice an animal, which is prohibited in Mahima Dharma. Regarding the *baidya* it is claimed that he might use the juice of the Tulsi plant, which is disregarded as a idol in Mahima Dharma. According to the survey, healing is the clue to understand the spread of Mahima Dharma among tribal communities. It is further argued that sacrifices signify material losses. They drain resources: Money has to be spent, goats are be slaughtered, etc. The survey concludes that the feeding of Babas, the reciting of hymns and the performing of fire rituals are cheaper then the traditional practices. This would be the very reason why tribal communities convert to Mahima Dharma. At a first look, this hypothesis, being entirely based on an economic argument, seems reasonable. However, I'm doubtful that the popularity of Mahima Dharma

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<sup>1</sup> This research is done as part of the Orissa Research Project (ORP) and sponsored by the German Research Council (DFG). The following data are based on fieldwork which I undertook in western Orissa from 2000 to 2001. I'm grateful to my many friends and colleagues from Sonapur and Anugul who assisted and helped me at many occasions. My special thanks go Kedar Mishra, Sanjeeb Kumar Nayak and Dr Gourang Charan Dash.

<sup>2</sup> Traditional healer who can be compared to a shaman. Since he works with substitutes and uses "strange" practices, including sacrifices and alcohol, he is derogatorily called "witch doctor" or "occultist".

<sup>3</sup> A *baidya* is a respected ayurvedic doctor.

among the tribal communities can be exclusively reduced to it. Further systematic research on the features of Mahima Dharma in its tribal setting is needed.<sup>4</sup>

I propose to contribute to this question with a short notice on healing stories as they are narrated within the community of Mahima Dharmees in western Orissa who come from the "untouchable" Ganda-Pana caste as well as from various non-Brahmin castes such as carpenters, farmers, milkman, oil makers, weavers, and fishermen. I have to emphasize that my investigation is entirely based on interviews and that I was not present in any of the narrated incidents. Neither did I see anybody curing somebody. I have further to recall that the interviews are the result of my interaction with Mahima devotees and ascetics. As such, they reflect the relation between the ethnologist and his "object" of study and should not be mistaken as objective mirrors of reality. The collected texts are indeed to be seen as results of a dynamic communicational process. Mixed with all kind of miracles, they are intended to prove the superiority of Mahima Dharma and the superhuman power attained by some of the Mahima ascetics. It goes without saying that it is beyond my scope to judge if these incidents really happened like they are narrated or not. This is not the matter of my concern since they vehicle imagined reality, i. e. they are "true" in the eyes of the narrator.

In other words, I do not evaluate the efficiency of the quoted practices, neither disqualify any practice as superstition. In fact, this topic requires a careful and balanced analysis. P. Sainath (1996:37) rightly pointed out that it is equally wrong to over-romanticize tribal as well as traditional health systems or to dismiss indigenous practices as absurd. One should further keep in mind that healing practices are imbedded in the larger problematic of public health which is too important to be reduced to its religious dimension. This becomes obvious when one looks into the pitiful condition of medical health care in Orissa's villages where people die in absence of doctors and medicine. The recent death cases in Southern Orissa due to malnutrition, food poisoning, malaria, etc. are still in everybody's mind. The newspapers repeatedly report how tribal communities become victims of quacks and exorcism. However, this complex problematic is beyond the scope of my presentation.

### **Healing: a metaphor of sacred power**

According to divers textual sources, the capacity of healing was attributed to Mahima Swami, the legendary founder of Mahima Dharma, right from the beginning of his religious career. The report submitted by the Manager of the Dhenkanal State, Babu Banamali Singh, to the Superintendent of the Tributary Mahals, dated as early as 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1881, affirms that Mahima Swami when he was residing at the Kapilash hills, relieved people from their diseases. This is reconfirmed by an article published in 1908 in a literary magazine called *Mukur*. The author of the essay, Damodar Mohanty, was a senior officer of the court of Sonapur Maharaj. In his essay he writes about Mahima Swami and Mahima Dharma:

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<sup>4</sup> See for example Lidia Guzy's (2001) research among the Desya-Khonds of the Koraput district.

In the propagation of this religion he [Mahima Swami] was assisted by his wonderful healing power. He was curing people from many diseases only by the power of his words. The sole medicine was the urine of the cow and cow-dung dissolved in water. So his glory spread all around very soon, because in the interior of Gadjat there was the need of efficient physicians. People were wild and uncivilized. They were also very superstitious [...] In those areas ghosts, and spirits were numerous and there was prevailing the practice of their worship. The exorcists were believed to displace or move the unmovable trees and awful mountains by the power of hymns and words. Diseases were treated by the help of *mantras*<sup>5</sup>, roots and bark of various medicinal plants. There was none to diagnose diseases. Treatment was purely hypothetical, a pure guesswork. [...] [Mahima Swami was daily initiating the patients to Alekha Dharma<sup>6</sup> who were coming to him for treatment. Giving him a little urine of the cow or water dissolving cow-dung, he was saying, "You utter the name of Alekha and you will be cured."<sup>7</sup>

Before addressing the question of the hidden realities in this narrative, caution should be reminded. One has to be very careful regarding this type of report because it is embedded in the colonial discourse. In this genre of literature information is often biased, misinformation is voluntarily spread. In the quoted passage the arrogance and ignorance regarding the so called uncivilized and wild people is manifest (cf. Pati 2001). The tribal communities are represented as superstitious because they attribute sickness to ghosts and spirits. The spread of Mahima Dharma is explained by the urgent need of physicians and doctors. In the same time it is stated that the followers of that new sect refuse any kind of medicine:

The followers of Alekhism [...] never use medicine for any decease. They only drink urine of the cow and sing *Alekh Bhajanas*<sup>8</sup>. [...] They are all intoxicated with *pika*<sup>9</sup> and smoke. Since the guru finds smoking of *pika* inevitable, he has made it a necessary principle.

Apart from the strong judgment of values and the inherent arrogance of the quoted text, some interesting information is given. Mahima Dharma did indeed spread particularly among the lower strata of society, i.e. among tribal communities and untouchable castes. It is also true that in a tribal society illness is attributed to the evil eye of spirits and malevolent deities. Diseases are believed to be caused by Gods or ancestors and the healing requires animal sacrifices. What is important to note here is the explicit refusal to take any medicine. Instead intoxicants, cow dung and sacred texts are used. One has to ask where this prohibition—which is also attested by the mentioned survey of the Tribal Research Institute—originates from.

Before we search for the theological justification of it, let us conclude that the legends according to which Mahima Swami possess the power to heal people can be traced back to the very beginning of Mahima Dharma. It should be reminded that it is a common fact that miraculous powers are attributed to the founder of a particular

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<sup>5</sup> Holy syllable, word or expression.

<sup>6</sup> Alekha designates Alekha Mahima, the Indescribable, the Void. Alekha Dharma or Alekhism are just other names for Mahima Dharma.

<sup>7</sup> The complete Oriya text is reproduced by Debendra K. Dash 1997.

<sup>8</sup> *Bhajana* is a devotional song.

<sup>9</sup> *Pika* is a pipe to smoke tobacco.

religious sect. That is how saints are conceptualized and constructed. The founder of a religious movement is bound to be different from his common fellows. Still the phenomenon cannot be reduced to a pure metaphor. It is evident that one of the major reasons why people join the Mahima movement is that they get cured from diseases. Mahima Dharma offers indeed more effective measures of healing than traditional healers and doctors.

### Holy man, holy texts and holy ashes

Let me now quote some healing stories which I collected during my field work in western Orissa. The first incidence is told by a man who lives with his family in Sonepur, belonging to the Karana community, Orissa's scribe's caste. He is a government employee and a sincere Mahima Dharmee. I mention his social background since he is well educated and lives in a town, i.e. he represents a different socio-cultural group than the tribal communities analysed by the Tribal Research Institute. Let us call him Sanjeeb Mahapatra. In an interview he told me this:

After my wife and myself were initiated into Mahima Dharma we perform regularly *sharana-darshana*<sup>10</sup>, *bhajana* and *kirtana*<sup>11</sup>. Sadhus come frequently to our house and stay with us. Once a sadhu came and I went with him to a nearby village to participate in a *bhajana* program. While we were singing, a woman from another village came and prayed helplessly that she had lost expectation of her husband's survival. A number of doctors, *kabirajas* and occult healers had failed to cure him. She told that Lord Alekha Mahima was her only anchor and shelter. The Baba listened to that woman and told me: "Let's go to her village. Things will be right if the Lord Alekha showers his grace." We went with the woman to her village and spent the night there singing *bhajanas* and performing *kirtana*. In the morning we went to see her husband. There was no hope of his survival. His body had become completely fleshless. He was looking like a skeleton. He was vomiting blood. The sadhu and myself asked Lord Mahima for his mercy. We prayed to him: "O Lord Mahima, you have begotten fifty-six crores of beings and you have been feeding and nourishing them. Please grant life to this helpless suffering man". After the prayer we took *renu*<sup>12</sup> and pasted it upon his forehead. We had no hope that this man would survive. We returned to our places that same day. After some days I went to the village again. I was thinking that the man surely had died and his family members might be living in sorrows and suffering without him. But reaching the village I was amazed to see him working on the roof of his house. He was completely cured. Wonderful is Lord Mahima's kindness!

This narrative is essentially a story about the greatness of Lord Mahima. The healing itself is attributed to Mahima Swami. The devotee has only to recite *kirtanas* and *bhajanas*. The quintessential of the metaphor is to understand how "wonderful" Lord Mahima is, to use Mahapatra's words. I would like to underline that the story

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<sup>10</sup> *sharana-darshana* is a regular practice of the Mahima Dharmees. Twice a day, before the sun arises and in the evening before the sun sets, the devotee turns east or westwards and recites the name of Lord Alekha. The ritual signifies literally to take refuge (*sharana*) at the feet of the Lord and to experience his presence (*darshana*).

<sup>11</sup> The ongoing singing of the divine name, which implies the use of instruments.

<sup>12</sup> *Renu* is the dust of the earth.

is well narrated and structured. Its dramatic character is well worked out. As the story goes on, the situation becomes more and more hopeless, the husband of the poor woman is nearly dead when the Baba and Mahapatra go to the village and pray. Still, an immediate result is not seen. One already gives up. But then, the surprising event occurs: he gets miraculously healed.

For me, Mahapatra became a never ending source of stories, most were experienced by himself. Others he might have read in books or heard from a third person. Still he achieved to rearrange them in a manner that they seemed to be his own experience. The important point is, however, that his healing stories are embedded in a deep faith and intensively lived religiosity. In the narrative about his own life, sickness and healing get a clear religious signification. They are an expression of an interaction between the Lord Mahima and Mahapatra, his devotee. Let us quote a story where he interprets his physical pain as a divine test:

Once I suffered severely from cough. My chest ached. I went to see the doctors. I consulted many. All turned futile. The doctors undertook thorough examinations of my health and told that I did not have any disease. Sadhus and saints told me that Lord Mahima was testing my commitment. One day, all of a sudden I felt a flicker of light came out of me and after a while it entered into my body again. Someone told me from above, "Go back! I bring you back to normal life." But my pain did not reduce after this event. Despaired, I went to the Khaliapali ashram and prayed before the ascetics. I prayed before the Shriya Mata, the great disciple of Bhima Bhoi to relieve me from pain. She told that I would have to suffer for one more year. Finally I sent a letter to Biswanath Baba of Joranda. He advised me in his reply to keep patience and wait. Some days passed away in this way. One night I had a dream. I saw a saint standing at the entrance of the village. His disciple came and took me to him. Arriving at the spot I knew that Biswanath Baba had appeared himself. I prostrated before his feet and cried. He lifted me up and blessed me. Then the dream ended and I woke up. After a few days I got relived from pain completely.

This narrative uses an interesting rhetoric element. Mahapatra tried to get cured from doctors but they were not successful. He was helpless and got hopeless too because all tentative cures failed. The narration of the failure has indeed a dramatizing effect.

I collected several similar stories. A man who lives in a small mud house in Sonapur and who belongs to the "untouchable" Ganda-Pana caste, told me about his experience:

Last year I fell terribly ill. My veins and arteries were getting tightened under spasmodic fits. I felt as if I was loosing walking ability. Gradually my left limbs weakened, as if they were going to be paralyzed. I went to the doctors, spent lots of money for medicines, but they didn't work. All my efforts turned futile. At last my tongue began to lose power and my eyes sight. [...] One day Guru Upendra Baba had been to our house. I prayed to him to cure me from this terrible disease. He did not say anything. I woke up from my sleep that night and went to him. As I reached the Baba, he woke up. With a graceful glance the Baba told me to go to the river. I followed him like an inanimate engine. It was winter. In the acute cold of the night my body was trembling from within the bones. Reaching the river *ghat* the Baba instructed me to take bath. The doctor had earlier advised me not to bath. Therefore I hesitated to obey the Baba and take bath. The Baba observing my hesitation assured me that no harm would happen if would bath. I went down into the water and took

ablution. Then the Baba converted me officially to Mahima religion. A couple of days later I dreamed in the night of a flooded river. Along its bank were walking a gang of Mahimite saints. They were to go somewhere. All of a sudden I woke up from my sleep and felt that I was cured completely. My disease had vanished. I had recovered my health. No disease has touched me since then.

The topics are the same: miraculous healing, charismatic Babas, medicines which do not work, and a sudden unexpected healing. The power of the narrative is always reinforced by dramatic moments. In the quotes narrative, the "patient" goes into the river though the doctor has strictly him forbidden to do so. It is winter and the temperatures are chilling. Even so, he trusts the Baba more than the doctor. He is initiated into Mahima Dharma and gets cured.

Let me add here that Babas are even believed to revive people who have already died. Sanjeeb Mahapatra has seen Baba Akshya Das doing this:

Once I met a sadhu named Akshya Das. He was a *siddha*<sup>13</sup>. While he was going through some village a man who was bitten by a poisonous snake fell down before his feet and died. No one should die after he surrenders himself under a sadhu's feet. Thinking this the sadhu put dust on the dead man in the name of Alekha. That dead man got back his life.

As already mentioned above, this story resembles the others. Sadhu Kishore Chandra Dash, 40 years old from Putupada, a village in the Balangir district, gives another example:

Once the dead body of a boy was being carried to the cremation ground to get burned. On the way a few Mahima saints were passing by. They begged the bearers of the dead body some logs of wood to prepare *dhuni*.<sup>14</sup> When the bearer denied, the saints told them to check the dead body whether the boy was not really dead. In fact the boy then got back his life.

The last two stories seem to be more fantastic than the others mentioned above. Still a common pattern can be established. The same elements can be extracted from other narratives: dreams, predictions, healing Babas. The culminating moment is almost the same, the successful and miraculous reviving of a dead person. Healing stories circulate about sacred places like Joranda, commemorated as Mahima Swami's *samadhi pitha* or about Balasingha, a village near Baudh where is commemorated Govinda Baba's *jata-samadhi*. A shrine hosting a huge ant hill is constructed on the spot where the matted hair of Govinda Baba, the first disciple of Mahima Swami, is buried. The same Mahapatra, quoted already many times, narrates:

One of my friends, who works in the Cooperative Department, had a lot of difficulties. He went to the shrine and the grace of Govinda Baba removed them all. Another friend had attempted suicide due his mental disturbances. I gave him some *renu* originating from Balasingha. As result, all his mental disturbances went away. [...] My father Gajendra Mahapatra once suddenly fell ill. I thought that he would not survive. So I went to the *jata-samadhi* of Govinda Baba at Balasingha and prayed

<sup>13</sup> A *siddha* is one who has attained the ultimate achievement, that is divinity.

<sup>14</sup> *Dhuni* is the fire ritual dedicated to Alekha Prabhu.

with great worries and anxiety. After I came back from Balasingha, my father told me that he had seen a wonderful dream. In the dream he was dead. The messengers of Yama were carrying him away when all of a sudden the chief messenger told me, "We have to return the life of this man, because Govinda Baba has shown kindness to him." After this, my father had recovered his health. He died after one year.

An old aged man from Balasingha confirms that healing can be performed at the shrine of Govinda Baba. According to him many patients get cured after they obtain the *remu* and *bibhuti* of this place. Many issueless parents seem to have got children by the grace of Govinda Baba. In fact it is commonly accepted that places of *samadhi* of any saint possess a special religious power. Ashrams of certain sadhus are equally powerful. About Putupada (Balangir district), the ashram founded by Krupasindhu Baba, it is said that persons can recover there from illness. It is affirmed that every year hundreds of persons get cured who were haunted by ghosts and spirits. I'm told that ghosts and sprits flee away after one touches the holy dust of this ashram. They cannot stay after they listen the beating of the *khanjani*<sup>15</sup>.

However, the healing power of a specific place is not based on its regional setting. As we have seen, it has always to do with a particular personality. In Balasingha it is the imaginary presence of Govinda Baba, in Putupada it is Krupasindhu Baba. In Kardula, a village near Sambalpur, Satya Narayan Baba is commemorated as having healed many people. People told me that any leprosy patient who surrendered himself to the Baba, was immediately cured. These narratives are not mere story-telling since I met myself several leprosy patients who assured to have been cured by the blessings of the Satya Narayan Baba.

Let me have a closer look into the way the healing occurs, into its performance. As stated above, certain texts are to be recited. They are mostly texts written by Bhima Bhoi, the famous saint-poet and disciple of Mahima Dharma who spread the new *dharma* in western Orissa. His *Atha Bhajans* and certain *bolis*<sup>16</sup> of his *Stuticintamani* are considered to be the most powerful texts. People recite them by heart or read them from small booklets which are widely circulated. The shortest form of any recital texts is, however, a *mantra* consisting simply of the Alekha Mahima's name. Baliyar Das from Jatasingha, district Sonepur, reports:

When I was a boy a little mark became visible in my brain. As a result I suffer from epilepsy. Even after my parents consulted a number of doctors, I could not be cured. Due to financial problems, it is not possible on my part to go to a big hospital for treatment. Whenever this disease attacks me, I perform the *japa*<sup>17</sup> of Alekha Mahima, the six lettered *mantra* and I recover after a while.

Here one is confronted again with the ugly face of poverty. People do not have access to medical health care because of their economic condition. Baliyar Das'

<sup>15</sup> A small drum which is usually used to accompany the singing of *bhajan*s. Often they also accompanied by a *gini* (small bell-metal cymbals) and a *kathi* (castanets).

<sup>16</sup> Bhima Bhoi's songs are regrouped in *bolis*, i.e. chapters. In the chapters 71 to 77, Bhima Bhoi identifies sin as sickness. Using the metaphor of healing, he asks God Alekha to remove all diseases which Bhima Bhoi has inside his body. In other words, God Alekha should liberate him from any sin (*Stuticintamani* 72, 12-13).

<sup>17</sup> *Japa* means the silent chanting of a *mantra*.

family lacks sufficient money to hospitalize him. Instead he took refuge in Mahima Dharma. He is not cured and still suffers from epileptic attacks. But somehow the performance of *japa* gives him relief. A-Le-Kha-Ma-Hi-Ma, to put it in six syllables, functions as a *mantra* which helps to control his epileptic attacks.

Along with the recitation of *mantras* and *bhajanas*, *dhuni*, the fire ritual, is performed. It is believed that its performance can cure people from all kind of diseases. However, I have to specify that *dhuni* is not only performed in order to achieve healing but represents a general ritual practice. It is usually conducted on full moon days or on any other auspicious occasion. In Sonapur I attended a *dhuni* which was organized on the occasion of a *shraddha*<sup>18</sup> ceremony. It has to be stressed here that only a Baba can perform *dhuni*. Common layman are not able to do it, a special religious authority is needed. The way the ritual is performed is almost the same. In a village always exists a special place where the ritual is performed. In the evening a Baba will come and prepare the firewood. As soon as the fire is burning well, he will pour *ghee* into it. The ritual will be accompanied by the recitation of *mantras*. A collective *bhajana* singing will follow.

*Bibhuti*, the remaining ashes of a fire ritual are considered to be a very effective medicine. A 33 years old young man from Putupada, Balangir district, narrates that he was severely ill and that he had gone to many doctors and occultists. But it was the *bibhuti* given to him which gradually healed his illness. I was myself given myself a small box with holy ashes which I should use in case of a sudden illness. Another rather funny incident happened to myself when I was asked by a Baba about my wife and children. As I told him that I had a wife but no children, he took his bag and handed me over some holy ashes. He ordered me to mix it with water and give it to drink to my wife after her period, after she had her first bath. My wife would get pregnant with a son shortly afterwards. Others confirmed that *bibhuti* can prevent women from miscarriages.

Another interesting observation has to be pointed out. When I collected my interviews, I was surprised how certain Babas rationalized their healing capacity and the possible effects. Let me quote the interview with Dasharathi Das Baba from Julunda to illustrate my point. He told me this:

By reciting the *bolis* 71 to 77 of *Stuticintamani* with wholehearted sincerity and purity, one can be cured from snake bites and many other diseases.

There is no doubt that the powerful effect lies in the recitation of Bhima Bhoi's poetry. However, after asking the Baba how the healing is performed, he told me that the poison has to be sucked out. In other words, the sole recitation of *Stuticintamani* is not sufficient. What is even more striking is the formulation of "wholehearted sincerity". The total devotion of the patient is required. The Baba does know very well that healing is not magic which works without the other's participation. In other words, the Baba asks his patient to belief in what he does and to submit himself totally to Lord Mahima. Only than he can get relieved from sorrow and disease. It is the notion of *biswas*<sup>19</sup> which emerges as crucial in order to

<sup>18</sup> Rites which are dedicated to honour the ancestors.

<sup>19</sup> *Biswas* means "faith".



understand the meaning of healing in this particular context. One fully trusts the healer and hands over his body to him. However, this phenomenon reminds me of what is commonly called the "placebo effect". It does not matter if you take *bibhuti* or any substitute of medicine, or if you recite a *mantra*, you have to have faith in what you are doing. If you do so, it may help. Though this is not meant as a support of the anti-medical position of the Babas, the positive effect of what one could name as auto-suggestion cannot be denied.

### Resisting traditional healing practices?

Let us come back to the survey of the Tribal Research Institute and the apparent hostility of Mahima Dharmees regarding the use of medicine. Is the reported attitude sanctioned by the sacred texts and theological arguments? Can we locate a refusal of traditional medicine within the poetry of Bhima Bhoi? It does not seem to be possible. Not only that this kind of prohibitions are missing in his texts and that the power of healing is attributed to him. He also often uses explicit medical terminology in his poetry such as disease (*roga*), acidity (*ama*), cough (*kapha*), patient (*malu*), medicine (*mausadhi*). It is further recorded that Hari Panda and Basu Panda (Bhima Bhoi's scribes) and Labanyabati (his spiritual consort) were *kabirajas*<sup>20</sup>. Labanyabati's maternal uncle was even one of the most famous *kabirajas* at the Royal Court of Patnagarh. It is therefore quite unlikely that the interdiction to take ayurvedic medicine was part of Bhima Bhoi's preaching.

The strict refuse of medicine was probably conceptualized and taught by some of the ascetic orders. As the movement spread, different groups and sects emerged such as the Balkaladharis and the Kaupinadharis. A report from the Under Secretary Government of Bengal, dated 21<sup>st</sup> October 1881 and forwarded to the Magistrate of Cuttack, stated that the Mahima Dharmees rely on the help of their god alone for the recovery from illness and only take a little bit of earth from the prayer ground mix it with water and drink it. We can trace more elaborate statements on this particular question to Biswanath Baba, who started establishing strict rules of behavior for all Mahima Dharmees, lay people as well as ascetics. Throughout his writings he is very explicit in affirming that no Mahima Dharmee should be allowed to take any kind of medicine. In his *Mahima Dharma Itihasa* he says:

If the body suffers from the attack of some disease then the devotee and the *samnyasis*<sup>21</sup> should have *sharana-darshana* of the Supreme Soul. They should pray to the Lord Supreme for quick mitigation and perfect cure of the disease. They should spend the night with singing of *bhajana* and praying while pouring *ghee* in the fire. Lastly they should have the *balya lila*<sup>22</sup> in the early morning. They should not use any medicine, given by a quack or offered by any other god or goddess (Biswanath Baba 1991:22).

If we follow Biswanath Baba's logic, the sole faith in Mahima Swami cures diseases. However, it is difficult to judge how far this rule is still followed today.

<sup>20</sup> *Kabiraja* is another name for *baidya*.

<sup>21</sup> A *samnyasi* is a holy man, an ascetic.

<sup>22</sup> A communal feast where children are fed first.

What about my findings? Some people do strictly follow this prescription. I personally know a woman who was going to deliver a child and obeyed a Baba who forbade her to see any doctor or to go for ultrasound checking. This had serious consequences because the date of delivery could not be properly established. But one has to mention that there are quite a few people who voluntarily break this rigid prohibition. In the monastery of Joranda I was told that an old aged Baba was brought to hospital since his health was deteriorating! Since this would not have been possible according to the rules and regulations prescribed by Biswanath Baba, it manifests a significant variety of attitudes. Coming back to the question whether there is a systematic abstention from traditional or allopathic medicine, no definite answer can be given. In fact, I suggest that among the present followers of Mahima Dharma, multiple practices coexist—if accessible—simultaneously, the main criteria being their efficiency.

## Conclusions

What can we conclude from my findings? Let me come out with some primary conclusions, although further systematic research and investigation is required.

Firstly, healing power is conceptualized as a attribute of a sacred person. Mahima Gosain, Bhima Bhoi as well as certain Babas are commemorated as healers. Healing is used as a metaphor to describe the supernatural and sacred nature of these particular persons. One is easily reminded of stories in which Christian or Muslim saints operate as miraculous healers. Healing is indeed a common topic of hagiographic narratives. However, it represents not only the marker of holiness but is also a powerful rhetoric to preach a religious message. One is reminded of conversion stories, where similar miracles are told in order to convince the other about one's own superiority.

Secondly, healing was despite of its metaphoric character—and still is—a wide spread practice among Mahima Dharmees. But this finding needs a rectification. Healing is not a specific practice of Mahima Dharmees. We have to recall that it is a wide spread phenomenon among religious groups all over in India, across borders of sectarian affiliation and belief. This very fact shows, however, how similar Mahima Dharma is to other ascetic movements (Lewis 1992:172-185).

Thirdly, we have to keep in mind that most of the Mahima Babas—like their counterparts in other sects—are not properly trained as healers. They even do not pretend to be so. Their healing capacity is part of their *shakti*, it is an expression of their sacred power which they obtain through renunciation of the world and their direct contact with the divine. With this background one is not surprised to see a lack of special analytical tools. The Babas do not examine the disease as such. For their healing no special treatments is required. Barren women, pain, all kinds of sufferings are cured in the same way. The Babas perform *bhajana* and *kirtana*. Sacred formulas are recited and holy ashes are smeared on the patient, or taken by him with water. Simultaneously, the patient is required to participate in the healing process by reciting *mantras* and offering his faith to Alekha Mahima. Only then the healing can be successful.

Fourthly, my investigation guided me towards a new understanding of Bhima Bhoi's poetry. As doing academic research on religion, I'm often mistaken to focus on texts and their literary meaning. If we look into the poems of Bhima Bhoi, healing is not a matter of importance. But when we turn our attention to the actual practice, Bhima Bhoi's *bhajan*s are not appreciated because of their poetic quality. They are sung in order to heal. We have therefore to direct our attention to the *ritual performance* of these texts. Independently from their literary meaning their recitation has the same effect as a recitation of a *mantra* in other ritual contexts.

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# The Munda

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The Munda constitute one of the major tribes of India. They belong to the Austro-asiatic language family. They are mainly concentrated in Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, Madhya Pradesh and Tripura, but their larger concentration is in the former three states. They are also found in the Assam tea garden areas.

There is a significant variation in the growth rate of Munda population in different states. While Madhya Pradesh has registered a growth rate of more than 25 per cent between 1961 and 1981 due to migration, Orissa shows a low growth rate, i.e. about 6 per cent in the corresponding decade. The reason being Orissa is one of their oldest habitat, next to Bihar. Moreover, migration of tribal population takes place in modern India for attraction of employment in industrial and mining sectors. Bhilai has attracted more labour than Rourkela in Orissa.

In Orissa, Munda population is spread out in a large number of districts. The undivided districts of Sundargarh, Keonjhar, Sambalpur, Kalahandi, Dhenkanal, Bolangir, Cuttack, Koraput and Mayurbhanj harbour more Munda population, because of its proximity to the State of Bihar. In Orissa, the Munda Tribe has been enumerated as a composite tribe in the census, for instance the Munda includes Munda, Lohara and Mundari.

## Historical Background

According to Munda tradition and folklore, their original homeland lay in the north-west. Their entry into the present habitat of Chhotnagpur, southern districts of West Bengal, north-western districts of Orissa and north-eastern district of Madhya Pradesh was within the last century. But this fact is not backed by any recorded evidence. It is reported that the Mundas, Oraons, Santals, and Mundari tribes led a pristine and archaic life in the Chhotnagpur plateau for centuries before the advent of the British in the area. The area was then under the administrative control of the Nagbanshi Maharaja of Chhotnagpur until 1765 A.D.

Choudhury divides the history of Munda into four phases. In the first phase, they were in possession of the Chhotnagpur plateau for several centuries along with other tribes. The original Munda settlers established villages known as Khunt-kati villages which means they cut the first post to settle down there. These were patrilineal, patrilocal and patriarchal villages which formed the nucleus of a segmentary political system. A patri-clan with its ramifications in other adjacent villages formed a segment of the total political system.

In the second phase, the Mundas came under the suzerainty of the Nagbanshi kings of Chhotnagpur. The Mundas, along with other tribes of the region, probably came

under the sway of this ruling family either by voluntary submission or by exertion of force. There was scanty evidence to indicate that the traditional Munda socio-economic polity was disturbed during the rule by the Nagabanshi kings.

Their third phase, beginning in the later part of the sixteenth century is perhaps the most crucial to the subsequent history of these people. It is around this time that the Nagabanshi king, Durjan Shal, was subjugated by the Moghul emperor, Amkbar. He was imprisoned for a short period and was prisoned by the Mughuls after he agreed to pay an annual tribute to the Muslim governor of Bihar.

Within a period of about 100 years which extended upto the incident of British annexation of the territory in 1765 A.D; a new class of people of non-tribal origin had settled in various parts of Chhotnagpur among the Mundas and other tribes who are known as Diku or aliens. The jagirdars or tenure-holders brought in thikedars and mercenaries to extract taxes and free services from the tribal tenants. As a result, the original settlers lost their proprietorship over their villages and they were reduced to ordinary rent paying *raiya*s.

In the fourth phase of Mundari history during the british period, the feudalistic pattern of land administration continued unabated. The practice of granting Jagirs received a severe blow in the traditional Mundari agrarian structure. These petty landlords known as *pattidars*, usurped most of the original Khunt-kati villages and reduced the tribals to rent paying *raiya*s and also settled several Hindu and Muslim aliens in their territory. Thus, the colonial administration rather kept the feudalistic super structure in fact until it was abolished after independence.

### **Literacy and Education**

Early impact of Christianity on this tribal community brought about an interesting phase of modern education among all tribes of Chhotnagpur region including the Munda. When we consider the problem of literacy and education among the Mundas we cannot afford to ignore the neighbouring Ho tribe. The Munda and Ho claim that they belong to one ethno-cultural stock. They do inter-marry on the basis of their clan segmentation. They are designated either as Ho or Munda according to the area they inhabit.

After Independence, the number of schools and colleges increased both in the government and private sectors and this helped in increasing the overall turnover of literates, general and professional educators. The Mundas living in West Bengal and Bihar registered higher percentage of literacy, both men and women, due to Christianity. Today educated persons right from Matriculation to University level are multiplied among the rank and file. This apart, technical and professional education has made a significant impact among the members of the tribe.

### **Land-use and Ownership Pattern**

Mundas are a settled agricultural tribe. They are very adept in both dry and wet cultivation. In Munda settlements, both low and upland are available for cultivation,

apart from non-cultivable waste land and forest land. In the Munda area immigrant Hindu castes though are not numerically dominant, their per capita land holding is either comparable with Munda *Pahans* or more. As a matter of fact earlier the Munda had higher per capita ownership of good and fertile land.

At present the situation is that non-tribals are in possession of good cultivable land under their possession which they have acquired from other tribal owners. Consequently the per capita land held by the Mundas has become less.

### **Family and Kinship**

The social structure of the Munda is based on the principle of unilineal descent and agnatic kin organization. The tribal society is characterized as kin-based. Among the Munda, close patrilineal kin association is formed on the basis of Munda socio-political structure. It determines the character and the authority structure of every type of kin group, namely, nuclear family, extended family, minimal lineage, maximal lineage, sub-clan, clan, sub-tribe and the tribe.

Rules of inheritance of property, counting of descent and succession to social positions are all determined unequivocally by the principle of patriliney.

The Mundas are divided principally into two endogamous sub-tribes, such as, Kompat and Tamaria. Kompat Mundas are said to be the original Mundas of Ranchi. Each of the sub-tribes is divided into a large number of patrilineal endogamous Killi or clan. Each clan has a name of an animal, bird, plant or an object. Munda clans are exogamous, i.e.; marriage within the clan is strictly prohibited. Sexual relationship among the members of the clan as considered is incestuous and is severely dealt with by the inter-village council known as *Parha Panchayat*.

Munda lineage organization is based on division of clan or sub-clan into a number of corporate units. Each lineage is known by a traceable ancestor whereas the ancestor or founder of a clan is mythical. The lineage is a corporate body. Each lineage has a recognized senior household head, (the senior most male member of which is considered as the head of the lineage). his advice and guidance are sought in all socio-cultural matters. Every lineage has a tutelary deity, called *Khunt-hanker-Bonga*, worshipped by all members of the lineage on the occasion of life cycle rituals and other important occasions.

The Munda family is usually nuclear in composition. A widowed mother, unmarried brothers, or sisters or a widower father are all part of the household. Structurally, household is unstable but family is relatively stable. The functions of household are economic, protectional, and upbringing and enculturation of children. Whereas the functions of family are limited to socially recognized sex relationship between husband and wife and procreation of children.

## Political Organization

The traditional socio-political organization of the Munda has two distinct corporate bodies, namely, the *Panch* of the village, the headman is known as Munda, and the other is, the inter-village organization, called *Parha*. The three recognized functionaries of the *Panch* are the Munda, *Pahan* and the *Mahato* or the messenger. All except *Pahan* are hereditary positions filled up by the principle of primogeniture. If such a candidate is unable to function, the office devolves on the next eldest male kin. The village priest called *Pahan* is selected from the *Pahan* lineage by the process of divination or *pagoiti*. In a *Panch* meeting all the adult males of the community are eligible to take part in the discussions but the final decision rests with Munda who functions both democratically and autocratically as per the situation at hand.

The Munda are quite conscious about their ethno-political identity and individuality since long. They were one of the few tribal communities who had resisted the pressure of colonialism, and had revolted repeatedly over encroachment on their traditional rights and agrarian interests. The Tamar insurrection of 1919-20 marked their strong resistance against the disruption of their agrarian system and traditional rights over land in Chotanagpur. This was intensified in 1850, and later on took a new turn. The forty years of Sardar movement on Malkud Larai (movement for control over land) from 1858 onwards aimed at dislodging the zamindars in their area. They also agitated against forced labour. In this quest for establishing the Munda Raj for reforming their society to cope up with the challenges of colonial times, they launched the millennial movement under the patriotic leadership of Birsa Munda (1874-1901). The Munda were involved in several movements which aimed at securing autonomy for Chotanagpur from 1915 onwards. In fact they had laid the foundation for the creation of Jharkhand state.

## Ideology

The Munda term their supernatural beliefs and practices as Sarna Dharam, which in the language of Anthropology is an admixture of animism, animatism and naturism. Nature worship occupies a central place in Munda religious idiom. Nature veers around their life from birth to death. Propitiation of nature and natural phenomena occupies the centre-stage in Munda religion. This signifies their prime dependence on the nature for survival. They both venerate and command natural phenomena. Shamanism and magical practices are an integral part of Munda religion. The Shaman or *Ojha* occupies an important social position almost equal to that of the priest or *Pahan*. In the ranking order both of them occupy social positions next to the Munda or headman.

The Munda have an unflinching faith in the supernatural beings including the manes. They designate all their gods and goddesses as *Bonga*, who are highly respected, feared and propitiated. The *Bonga* are believed to be controlling human life, health, fate, livestock, crops and all the natural phenomena. They may ensure happy, peaceful and prosperous life, if pleased or may cause disaster and misery for erring humans. Since the Munda, like most other tribal communities, directly depend on the nature and natural phenomena for survival, they propitiate them as inveterate

symbols of supernatural entities, whom they regard as *Bonga* or deities. There are both male and female deities. Although there is no definite hierarchical order in respect of the *Bongas*, yet by general consensus the *Sing-Bonga* or creator of the universe is regarded as the supreme deity. The abode of the *Sing-Bonga* and other benevolent deities is a sacred grove of sal (*shorea robusta*) trees located at the outskirt of almost every Munda village. Sacred grove is a regular feature of other Mundari group of tribes, such as Santal, Ho, Kol, etc. *Sing-Bonga* is omnipresent, omnipotent, and omniscient and therefore, always accorded the primary of veneration. The next important deity to be propitiated is *Basuki Thakurani*, the Mother Earth, who is considered as the consort of *Sing-Bonga* or *Dharam Debata* (Sun God). She is adored on all-important festive occasions along with *Sing-Bonga*.

*Gram Siri* is the presiding deity of the village. He and his consort *Kiasuni Thakurani*, represented by two stone slabs bedecked with vermilion, are ensconced in the sacred grove of *Jahera* on *bondasal*. They are the protectors of the village. They are worshipped on all festive occasions like magh parab, baha parab, nuakhia, makar parab, ashadhi parab, gamba parab etc.

Every clan among the Munda has a tutelary deity, called *Marang Bonga*, who is meticulously propitiated on all festive occasions to ward off sickness, crop failure and catastrophe in respect of the members of a clan. Another important deity of the Munda pantheon is *Desauli Bonga*, the goddess who controls epidemics and fatal diseases. *Desauli Bonga* is propitiated whenever the need arises to appease her. Similarly, *Buddhipat* or the goddess of rain is worshipped whenever there is need for rain-fall to protect their crops.

The Munda make both vegetarian and non-vegetarian offerings to their gods and goddesses invariably along with handia or home-made rice beer. Their best offering is the blood of goat or chicken. Apart from worshipping their gods, goddesses and presiding deities, the Munda also appease spirits, as and when needed. They believe in both benevolent and malevolent spirits. As per their cognitive perception, every object-animate or inanimate-has spirit or life-force. They consider the souls or spirits of the dead (ancestors) as benevolent, who are to be remembered and offered food and beverages almost regularly. But malevolent spirits are appeased whenever they are believed to have inflicted adversity on a person, family or village.

All festive occasions are hilarious, mirthful, ecstatic and socially cohesive for the Munda. They indulge in revelry inebriation and leisure-time sports on festive occasions. On such occasions they also give free recourse to conspicuous consumption as kins exchange social visits. Material deprivation is no hindrance even for the assetless ones. Religion is socially pervasive and has important social implications. It is a force for social cohesion as it provides social sanction for approved behaviours.

### **Impact of Modernization**

With the process of modernisation in the country and development of mass media, both print media and electronic media have greatly helped the Mundas and other advanced tribes to catch up with non-tribal communities in the field of education,



both general and technical. The spread of education among the women of Munda of Bihar, West Bengal and Orissa is very significant. As the system of communication has developed over the recent decades, Mundas have derived significant benefit to march ahead along with their neighbours. Both Munda men and women have taken to salaried jobs, both in government and non-government institutions and several of them are now holding professional and specialized positions which were not within their reach earlier. Measures of constitutional safeguards and protective discrimination have significantly benefited the Mundas and other tribes of the country to register progress, prosperity, and happiness. As they are availing of modern health care facilities, many epidemic and dreaded diseases have sharply declined amongst them.

Political modernisation among the Munda and other tribal communities has been achieved through the introduction of Statutory Panchayat. But it is not yet compatible with their traditional polity. It is not equipped to sort out issues relating to their traditional rights and breach of tribal customs. However, with the rise of the level of awareness of people and change in other factors many a problem could be eliminated.

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