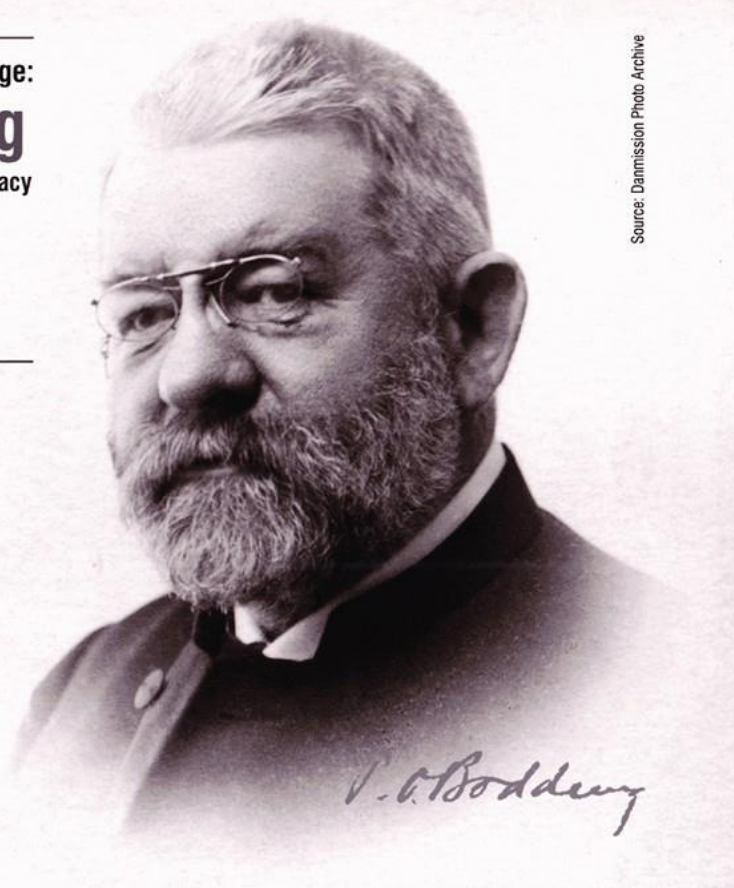


Remembrance, Reflection, Reconciliation and Renewal - The Bodding Symposium 2015





Belief, Scholarship and Cultural Heritage:
Paul Olaf Bodding
and the Making of a Scandinavian-Santal Legacy

3-5 November 2015

An international symposium organized by
Museum of Cultural History, University of Oslo
and University of Tromsø

Source: Dammission Photo Archive

 Manhi Pargana
Museum of Santal Culture
মহাশিবপুর জাতীয় স্মৃতিসৌধ

 UiO Museum of Cultural History

P. O. Bodding

End report by Tone Bleie

20 May 2016



Symposium participants at the reception in Oslo City Hall
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ISBN 978-82-8244-158-2 (e-version)

Frontcover: Johnny Kreutz

INTRODUCTION

This conference report realizes a pledge the co-organizers¹ of the Bodding Symposium 2015 made as part of our initial official conference announcement. We have endeavored to avoid producing a tedious end report that simply reiterates the proceedings over three momentous conference days. Instead, we have strived to design this report so that it illuminates foundational ideas of the *Bodding Symposium 2015* and summarizes its practical suggestions for follow-up. Moreover, as author I attempt to convey the “heartbeat” of three special days in downtown Oslo, enlivened through citations from symposium papers, panels, and later post-conference feedback from several of the conference’s more than 80 participants. The four partner institutions² to the Symposium have graciously read the draft report and backed its completion. The venue, the meticulously restored Professor Residence (*Professorboligen*) on the University of Oslo’s historic campus grounds, is situated a stone’s throw from the Museum of Cultural History (MCH). It is the stately *Art Décor* building in which the magnificent Santal Bodding Collection has been preserved, stored and displayed since it was dispatched by sea from British India in a number of consignments to Norway in the early twentieth century. The Museum remains today one of two principal custodians of the Bodding Collection. The other custodian is the National Library of Norway (NLN). On arrival, the foreign and national participants who walked across the autumn leaf clad campus lawns and into *Professorboligen*, could literally imagine how the young scholar and missionary Paul Olav Bodding a century ago walked on the very same pathways as us. Over the three following conference days, the participants would be guided through an historic cultural trail, especially organized for them. The route took us all through a mounted exhibition at MCH into the vast temporary storage space of the ethnographic and prehistory parts of the Bodding Collection and further into a specially mounted symposium exhibition at NLN of rare specimens of the Bodding Manuscript Collections.

Welcoming an exceptionally diverse group of participants

The Inaugural Session was arranged to kindle an atmosphere of recognition and visibility of the different sections of the unusually diverse assembly of participants.

On behalf of the organizers, **Professor Øyvind Fuglerud** introduced **Håkon Glørstad**, the Director of the hosting institution, the Museum of Cultural History.

Glørstad welcomed the participants to the Symposium “Belief, Scholarship and Cultural Heritage: Paul Olav Bodding and the making of a Scandinavian-Santal Legacy”. He commended the event as a collaborative initiative between the Universities of Oslo and Tromsø, the National Library and Goshaldanga Bishnubati Trust and Museum of Santal Culture.

He said; “*the symposium is commemorating the 150th. Anniversary of Bodding’s birth and is the first ever to address comprehensively the diverse and enduring legacy of the scholar-missionary Paul Olav Bodding who lived from 1865 to 1938*”.

¹The two co-organizers are the University of Oslo by the Museum of Cultural History and the University of Tromsø – Norway’s Arctic University, the by the Scandinavian Santal Heritage Initiative (*SSInherit*) and Tromsø Museum.

²The partner institutions includes in addition to the two co-organizing universities, the National Library of Norway and the Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adibasi Trust and Museum of Santal Culture at Bishnubati.

He continued, “We invite contributions on a revitalized custodianship and collaborative uses of the Santal Bodding Collection in a digital and post-colonial era”. He ended expressing his delight being able to receive so many distinguished participants from Asia and Europe.

“My aspiration is to make the symposium an inclusive event as possible for core constituencies of the founding Santal Church, Mission and the pastoral enlightenment legacy within which Bodding was so central, “said initiative taker and co-organizer Professor Tone Bleie.

She welcomed distinguished scholars, human rights defenders, writers, current and former leaders and senior missionary staff of the Santal Mission, representatives of two of the successor missions Normisjon and Danmision, and descendants of some of the Mission’s pioneers.

Bleie ended her opening speech on a questioning note: “Will the Symposium act not simply as a dignified closure of an era, but as an opening window for future renewal and rediscovery? Are we heading towards a future of academic exchange and co-management of the Bodding Collection as central pillars?”

Boro Baski and **Sanjeeb Drong** greeted the participants on behalf of the Indian and Bangladeshi delegations.

Dr. Baski introduced his community Bishnubati, a Santal village southwest of Kolkata in which the villagers have been engaged in socio-economic development work for 25 years. Baski said; “I have since yesterday felt a great sense of excitement especially among the attending Santals about this historic opportunity to discover more of our own roots”. He continued by noting there are several vital questions he hope the symposium will address, including, how the deep knowledge Rev. Bodding had about Santal culture can be made meaningful for Santals and others today.” He ended by a note of warm thanks and handed over the word to his colleague from Bangladesh.

Drong, the Secretary General of Bangladesh Adibasi Forum, spoke on behalf of six attending Bangladeshis from the indigenous community; four Santals and two Garos, himself included. “We struggle for our human rights and constitutional recognition”, Drong said. We seek peace, a condition you Norwegians value and promote through your annual Nobel Peace Prize.

Drong thanked the many attendants who have previously lived and worked in Bangladesh. “You love our people and I like to extend my gratitude to your parents and grandparents. You will not forget. And this symposium is opening a new window for collaboration between our people”, he said by way of conclusion.

Anne Randine Øverby, Artistic Director of Bergen Opera, rounded off the inaugural session. We had invited Øverby in her twin capacity as renowned artist and missionary child who grew up in East Pakistan (in Amnura in East Pakistan, later Bangladesh) and South India during the 1960s and 1970s. Øverby’s riveting words of introduction struck a deep emotional chord and remembrance in the audience, as she shared how her at times trying upbringing as a boarding child invariably had molded and prepared her for an artistically rich yet demanding career. She rounded off with the Santali song *Dela Dela*. Attending Santals, retired missionaries and descendants of missionaries spontaneously joined in. Some hummed the lyrics and the tune, others joined took part in full, turning the solo performance into a communal and moving moment at the crowded *Professorboligen*.

The Santal Mission of the Northern Churches in a broader historical and contemporary context

The interdependencies of the early internal missions to the “Lapps” of Northern Norway and the later external missions to “heathen” peoples on the Asian and African continents have been hid and hitherto poorly understood be that through the lenses of history of religion, theology or cultural studies. Based on this recognition, the Symposium’s first session, showcased invited historically informed comparative papers

as well as contributions addressing the impact of these missionary legacies today in terms of minority statuses, identity politics, history of education, and land rights and management of im/material culture heritage.

Dikka Storm, an authority on the cultural history of the indigenous Sami and museum curator, unraveled in front of a fascinated crowd of social scientists, cultural and social workers, museum specialists, theologians, and missionaries the historical encounters between pietistic missionaries and shamanistic nomads in Denmark-Norway in the early eighteenth century. Drawing on historical materials (missionary reports, diaries, maps, church records, marriage and birth registries) and contemporary sources, Storm painted a layered story of a powerful state-sponsored mission which effectively pushed back the frontier of the Danish-Norwegian state's influence and border control. Hers was an intriguing analysis of a high-church mission, directed from the capital Copenhagen and the bishopric of Trondheim (in central Norway). Storm highlighted how generations of travelling missionaries worked closely with local clergy among an ethnically diverse population. These events unfolded about 150 years prior to the arrival of Scandinavian missionaries in Santal Parganas. The interval notwithstanding, we could not avoid noticing certain startling similarities: the alliance between missionary and schoolmasters; the importance of native languages in evangelization; and the shamanistic drum as the most central object and medium of sacred knowledge and branded as a tool of "the devil" both in Norway and British India. Such views rationalized systematic destruction on both continents.

Leif Pareli, Curator at *Norsk Folkemuseum* and currently heading a repatriation project (*The Bååstede Project*) contextualized the current project by a stark portrayal of the encounter between the missionaries sent out by the authorities of Denmark-Norway and the *Noaiti* (shamanistic practitioners). Pareli also described how Lappish artifacts (mostly household objects and garments) formed the nucleus of the University's ethnographic collection at its official opening in 1857. Lappish artifacts were sought after objects and traded with several major European museums. A contemporary of Bodding, with a similar unparalleled role as collector of artifacts, an emissary of the Norwegian Sami Missionary Society, collected objects for the Ethnographic Museum between 1907-1950.

In the wake of a revivalist ethno-nationalist movement in the 1970s and 1980s, resulting in the state acceding to Sami demands for recognition, a debate started about possible repatriation. But it took several years before it grew into a full-fledged demand and Pareli himself became convinced of the feasibility and reconciliatory effects of repatriation. Pareli gave a vivid and illuminating description of the delicate and demanding technical, technological, institutional and financial issues involved. He noted that the Bååstede (meaning "return") ongoing repatriation effort might last for several more years. He said conclusively:

"Is first and foremost a recognition of the desire of the Sami people to exercise control of their own cultural heritage. On an emotional level, it is meant to contribute to the healing of wounds of the past."

Sanjeeb Drong, leader of *Bangladesh Adibasi Forum*, concluded the first session. He addressed the relative importance of the legacies of different missions for the current situation of different groups of Adibasis. Drong is a prominent national civil society leader. Himself a Garo, advocate, and journalist, he has closely observed the livelihood, educational, and degree of self-government of Bangladesh's nearly 50 indigenous communities for decades. Drong highlighted the dire and worsening livelihood situation of the great majority of Plain Adivasi groups. Moreover, he spoke of the worsening human rights situation of Bangladesh's beleaguered ethnic minorities at large. A substantial portion of the Plain Adivasis are Christians of various denominations. Christianity's standing among Bangladesh's ethnic minorities is largely a result of a longstanding presence of especially Protestant dominations, including Lutheran, Baptist and Anglican churches, in addition to the Catholics and several recent faith-based entities. Drong credited the churches for their significant generation-long humanitarian and development efforts. They have made certain

noticeable impacts in terms of access to basic and higher education, other social services and health service outreach. But the approach to rights-based development by the various churches and their NGOs were too timid and selective, Drong added, because they failed to address the most critical source of income and sense of belonging: land.

“Visionary leadership in the churches are crucial. If Adivasi’s lose their lands and villages, then who will be served by the churches?”³

Drong ended by calling for a strengthening of the Indo-Bangladeshi partnership of Adivasis and a stronger emphasis on minority rights in Norwegian-Bangladeshi bilateral cooperation. Here the future policy framework should give a greater role both to civil society and academic institutions in reviving the Scandinavian-Santal legacy. The session’s focus then shifted from the larger scenario of Bangladesh to India.

Trygve Bruås Nesse, a political scientist and former member of the Normisjon staff, presented a synthetic paper on rural democracy and the political economy in West Bengal and Jharkhand. He addressed the larger political and economic forces that to some degree can explain the modus operandi of extractive industries in Adivasi-inhabited areas of Central and Eastern India. A key question is how local democratic institutions function in state and local levels of governance and in implementing rural development, Nesse argued. His findings documented how the primitive accumulation of capital in West Bengal and Jharkhand is realized, which he linked to specific democratic deficits and lack of political transparency. The political situation is not altogether bleak, however:

“I also find some signs of expanded democratic participation, especially in the case from West Bengal, where formerly excluded peasant and indigenous groups has been able to put perceived collective issues on the political agenda. My findings suggest that, contrary to pure economic perspectives of primitive accumulation; that local political institutions are relevant for key aspects of how primitive accumulation functions and affect peasant communities”.

The paper following Nesse’s complemented it in addressing the relative impact of the Scandinavian enlightenment legacy at large.

Lawrence Besra, of World Vision Bangladesh, opened his talk by stating:

“My paper represents my inner feelings and responsibilities beyond the solidarity I feel towards my indigenous people continual struggle for its rights to land, education, health care and equal citizenships rights in Bangladesh and the connections with the Scandinavian-Santal legacy.”⁴

Besra spoke of Bodding as ethnographer. Besra provided a sweeping overview of the colonial legacy of disruption and exploitation of Santals during the British colonial period (1757-1947). Bodding was an early user of modern fieldwork methods in Santal Parganas and elsewhere and always work in close collaboration with Santal teachers (*gurus*), Besra said. He credited Bodding with having unpacked the unique governance system of the Santals in his widely read publications. They were also a standard reference for the colonial authorities, who gave Rev. Bodding an elevated status (as Lars Skrefsrud before him) as an intermediary between the Santal society and the Britishers. Besra’s paper praised Bodding as “a renaissance hero” of the Santals. His acclaimed grammars and five-volume dictionary formed much of the foundation and tools of formal native education and nation-building founded on collective pride in Santali and based on Roman script. Besra shared frankly how internal dissent over the choice between Bengali or Roman script in pre-primary mother tongue education, excluded Santali from the recently

³ Drong p. 8

⁴ Besra p. 1

launched government scheme aimed at providing education in six mother tongues. Concluding, Besra reminded the audience of the extreme marginalization of the Santal community in electoral politics of Bangladesh. Only once in the Post-Raj period has someone from the Santal community been elected as member of the legislative assembly.⁵

In the session's final paper, **Oddvar Holmedal** and **Jacob Smørdal** presented Normisjon's current program among the Santals of Assam, Jharkhand, and North-Western Bangladesh.⁶ Combining the screening of photos, texts, and oral comments, they offered a sweeping overview of ongoing projects under the Santal Social Development Program. Especially their visual and non-visual evidence of the massive and permanent damage caused by the open cast mining industry to the environment and public health in the Benagaria area, the Mission's first and historic headquarters, was disturbing. It triggered an engaged debate on why this destructive industry thrives and whether it would be possible to form a public alliance that can effectively convince the government of Jharkhand to contain it and close it down.

Revisiting Bodding as theologian, bible translator, hymnologist, and administrator

The next session called for contributions offering new critical perspectives and evidence of Bodding as theologian, church administrator, and hymnologist.

The miniscule international response in the way of submitted papers on Bodding as theologian and missiologist, deserves mentioning. It may reflect a real discrepancy between Bodding's truly central and multifaceted influence in one of Scandinavia's most profiled low-church missions and scholarly interest. This observation prompts the question: whose low scholarly interest? South Asianists with a background in the social sciences have largely been preoccupied with Bodding the linguist and ethnographer. If so, what about scholars in theology and history of religion? This category should encompass theologians with a social background from conservative high and low-church protestant milieus. Dr. theol. Olav Hodne is notably the only scholar (and from the Santal Mission) of this era to have subjected the theologian, church administrator, linguist, and ethnologist to what is in several respects a refreshingly balanced in-depth scrutiny. The two accepted lead papers, one by a prominent Asianist and the other by an indigenous theologian covered ample and important new ground.

"I wish to restore to Bodding the honor of reforms for which he was never thanked, as well as to locate this critical period of the Mission's History within the contemporary development of Christian Mission in general" professor Harald Tambs-Lyche said, by way of introducing his paper.⁷

Harald Tambs-Lyche (Prof. Emeritus University of Picardie-Jules Verne, Amiens) captivated the audience with a rich, nuanced, and provocative narrative of Bodding's seriously underappreciated feats as a mission administrator between 1910 and 1923. He actually democratized the mission's organization, while wrangling with Anglo-Indian trust law, Tambs-Lyche argued. His paper offered new insights into how Bodding's reformist views as educated theologian and the views of the Norwegian national committee in particular reflected two important neglected, related contexts. The so-called "Church conflict" (*Kirkestriden*) unfolded between 1880s and the 1930s. A related dispute centered on alternative ways in which the low-church Santal Mission could affiliate or merge with the high-church, well-organized *Norwegian Missionary Society* (NMS) or with the low-church China Mission. Tambs-Lyche ended his talk with a refreshingly forthright and informed analysis of why Bodding's third marriage and divorce became such an extremely delicate

⁵ This was Sagram Murmu, elected from United Front of East Bengal in 1954, Besra op.cit p. 14

⁶ O. Holmedal and J. Smørdal: The Present Work Among Santals in relation to Ecology, Livelihood, Traditional Culture and Human Rights

⁷ Tambs-Lyche p. 1

matter, leading to his dismissal as head of the Mission and a sort of collective denial in the Mission's memory of Bodding's exceptional, and lasting importance.

When Rev. Bodding took over the helm as Secretary of the Mission, it disposed over nearly 250 Santal "workers" (*arbeidere*), but an abysmal number of ordained Santal pastors, five to be exact. At the time of Bodding's demise, the number of ordained native pastors had increased considerably. Given the imminent necessity of grooming a native-led national church, the Mission launched a modest sponsorship program in divinity studies for brilliant Santal students who wished to study abroad. While internal dissent over theological issues existed within the clergy, the lines of conflict were not only between native and foreign pastors. Within the budding native clergy dominated by an elite, few theologians distinguished themselves by calling for reform or a more radical critique. This may suggest that the intellectual space within the mission for theological debate was limited. Dissenters either voluntarily or by compulsion had to find new offices and institutional platforms on which to debate more fundamental and controversial issues.

Timotheas Hembrom, a retired professor of Bishop's College in Kolkata and ordained Presbyterian, is one such rare, profiled theologian. His symposium paper raises a pertinent, strikingly under-researched issue: the distinctly conservative theological turn the Mission took during the Bodding era, his own contribution to this turn and its arguably grave consequences for the Santals' beholden support to the Lutheran Mission. The theologian Bodding is a central actor in the rise of this dogmatic theology, Hembrom argues.

The influential booklet *Kukli Puti* (The Book of Questions and Answers) and Bodding's two bible translations, suggest in Hembrom's analysis a striking shift from a consistent use of traditional epithets and names for the Santals' chief deity to Bengali epithets. Bodding committed a category mistake by equating *Maran Buru Bonga* with the Christian Devil/Satan, resulting in a gross misrepresentation of Santal cosmology.

*"This greatest theological error first finds concrete documentation and visibility in Bodding's Kukli Puti and the hymns books, and in many Santali Christian songs of the period. This wrong equation potentially closed down all paths of dialogue between the primeval religion of the Santals and (Lutheran) Christianity."*⁸

Revisiting Bodding's Scholarship: the ethnographer, linguist and collector

For this session papers had been invited that reexamined the principal areas of scholarship in which Bodding has left a huge legacy. This thematic division between the scholar and missionary does not assume these principal domains can easily be separated empirically speaking. Indeed, we encouraged authors to explore their interface using non-reductionist approaches.

In the previous session, Hembrom had presented a serious theological critique of Bodding's (and indeed other Lutherans') interpretation and translation of the Santal notion of *Marang Buru*. Would any of the papers in this session address the incredibly central issue of how Bodding the linguist or rather theologian and linguist interpreted basic tenets of Santal cosmology?

Marine Carrin, a French anthropologist affiliated with LISST Centre d'Anthropologie Sociale and a leading international authority on the Santals, launched this session. She presented an incisive and consequential analysis of how Bodding approached his nearly life-long work on the monumental Santal Dictionary. By way of introducing the analysis, Carrin underlined the Dictionary's critical importance to the very establishment of linguistic specializations of Mundari languages at Ranchi University and other academic institutions in India.

⁸ Hembrom, p. 2

“Certainly, the dictionary has stimulated the creativity of Santal authors and the emergence of Santal intellectuals who feel it important to keep in touch with the subtleties of their language (Carrin 2013). Even for illiterate Santals, the dictionary “as an object of knowledge” is impressive, and I remember how Santals who could not read roman script urged me to explain to them some of its definitions. More importantly, the dictionary stands in Santal imaginary as a companion and as the witness of a culture which is still around, though many deplore the loss and the memocide produced by the colonization of the mind.”

Carrin continued by underlining how the Santal Dictionary stands as a testimony to how Bodding lived among the Santals for many years, and how he strove to understand the richness and complexity of their language and social organization. Carrin did not address directly Ruby Hembrom’s relevant critique – poignantly termed the Bodding paradox” based on the Folktales series as her prime empirical case. Carrin’s principal argument (based on the citation above) mainly addressed the desire of Bodding, and of his predecessor Skrefsrud for the Santal Dictionary to become a tool for the Santal nation at large. Carrin’s exposé was a tour de force in which she analyzed Bodding’s notion of semantic fields, speech acts, speech and emotions, terms for social relationships, words with double meanings and finally echo words. The Santals have developed over successive generations oratory into an impressive art. In Carrin’s assessment, Bodding passes her rigorous scholarly test. *“Certainty Bodding succeeds in re-enchanting Santal words. The definitions of the dictionary, which are necessarily concise and never dry, since we feel that Bodding is always listening, with an inner ear, to the emotions which pervade the language.”*⁹

For decades, a small number of highly dedicated scholars have gained access and made extensive use the vast manuscript collection in Oslo. They have discovered and made innovative use of its extraordinary breadth and depth. Santosh Soren was the only Santal in the inner circle of collection-oriented scholars. Soren’s extensive foray into the manuscript collection motivated him in the 1990s to write *Santalia: A Catalogue of Santali Manuscripts in Oslo*. This is an annotated catalogue over the vast Manuscript Collection. Soren’s rich guide and practical tool for users, the main entries of which is Santali (with English translations), is a cornerstone for Santali-speaking users. Since the number of Santali-speaking users has been so low, the catalogue has been sadly underused since it was published in 1999 by NIAS in Copenhagen, given the small number of visiting Santali-taught scholars. It was therefore of considerable importance that Soren agreed to deliver a paper at the symposium.

Santosh Soren’s (rtd. Librarian, Roskilde University in Denmark) fascinating paper probed an often-mentioned, but rarely thoroughly investigated issue: the degree to which Bodding’s vast intellectual legacy from his years in India was critically indebted to native gurus, storytellers, craftsmen, and others that are rarely acknowledged, but whom we know were in Rev. Bodding’s service officially as domestic workers or members of the project staff. Soren’s analysis revealed that beyond the non-descript colonial category of “helper,” native contributors to *Santal Dictionary* were highly respected and knowledgeable, most of them self-taught before being trained by Bodding for their different jobs. Under Soren’s careful elucidation, several important mediators of tradition or “oral vocabularies” were mentioned: Biram Häsdak’, Moŋgol Häsdak’, Sagram Murmu, Mohon Hembrom, Sido Häsdak’, Suna Häsdak’, Gupinät Kisku, Bəriar Kisku, Jeṭha Murmu, and Kandna Soren.¹⁰ Concluding, Soren made use of the term “theatre play” as an apt metaphor for Bodding’s ingenious practical organizational ability to identify, train, and involve Santals:

“Some collected stories, others wrote them down or did both; some were asked to give him as many words as they knew, others were requested to give meaning and explanation of words in every possible way so that the semantic accuracy could be attained; and some sat for hours or days with him to find Santal equivalents of

⁹ Carrin, p. 16.

¹⁰Soren, op. cit . p. 2.

Greek, Aramaic or English words and to construct a reliable sentence which could be understood by general people. It needed co-operation, patience and a long waiting time.”¹¹

Several scholars at the symposium highlighted the extraordinary importance of Bodding’s five-volume dictionary of nearly 3,500 pages and 26,000 words. As organizers, we were excited to receive a paper addressing a very specific and neglected research question: the degree to which Bodding’s early twentieth-century scholarship stood the rigorous test of modern linguistics, working comparatively on the North Munda languages, including Santali, Mundari, Ho, Birhor, Turi, Asuri and Korwa.

Professor **Toshiki Osada**, a Japanese linguist and specialist on Munda languages who has worked on Santal phonology since he was a Master’s student in the early 1980s, shared how he had been pleasantly surprised to know about the availability of a reprinted version of Bodding’s dictionary by Oslo University Press after a visit to Benagaria Mission in 1981. “From a modern linguistic point of view, the phonological analysis of Bodding is a little bit problematic,” Osaka argued. He concluded:

“It is very useful for modern linguists to read Bodding’s enormous works on linguistics, i.e. Santali Dictionary, Materials on a Santali Grammar and Santal Folklore. I visited Oslo last year to see Bodding’s materials kept in Norway National Library. It was wonderful to spend time at the library, reading the hand-written materials in Santali. Bodding taught me how to collect data from native speakers. I have just heard that these materials are accessible on internet, so now I do not need to go to Oslo, I can just check them at home!”¹²

Given that two of the four partner institutions hosting the symposium are custodians of artifacts and manuscripts, it goes without saying that we welcomed contributions that could cast light on Bodding’s lifelong work as a collector. They could include scholarly forays into Bodding’s wider intellectual milieu in British India and Scandinavia, and formative literary ideas about folklore in Bodding’s generation and the next generation, whose formal education concurred with the late Bodding. But their intellectual grooming and blooming as folklorists and ethnographers continued after the Second World War. **Ass. Professor Peter B. Andersen’s** (University of Copenhagen) paper comparing “two generations of Scandinavian collectors”, was therefore much appreciated.

Early in his presentation, Andersen made an important contextualization of Bodding’s scientific approach to his lifelong collection of Santal folktales. Bodding was inspired by Asbjørnsen and Moe’s collection of Norwegian folktales and the German Grimm brothers’ of German tales. He therefor pursued a typological approach and wrote primarily to a folklorist readership. Bodding collected many autobiographical statements that contained useful folklore. However, Anderson argued, Bodding’s editorial approach to such immensely valuable material was to promote love for the missionary cause. The ultimate aim was evangelization. The Danish anthropologist Halfdan Siiger arrived in Assam in 1949 as a member of the Third Danish Expedition to Central Asia. Andersen described how Siiger came to work on the Bodos of Assam. They were converts and lived in or close to the Assam Colony. The IHM missionaries, who were well acquainted with collections, were happy to extend their support to Siiger, who stayed at Patkijui village but visited the mission stations Gaurang and Bongagaion. Concluding his comparative analysis of Bodding’s and Siiger’s respective approaches to folklorist studies, he argued:

“Seen from the history of anthropological collections of rituals and folklore it is however easy to see the differences. Where Bodding anonymized his informants into the mass of folkloristic evidence. Siiger tried to give his informants a life in their own right. A fact, which comes to life when one, compares Bodding’s biographies of his informants which were written for the defense of a theological position, with Siiger’s

¹¹ Soren, op. cit p. 8

¹² Osaka, op. cit. p. 4

autobiographies on some of his informants. They were written to give his informants life and authenticity (before the word was known), and to open up for future analysis."¹³

Anyone who has been responsible for a symposium program will tend to realize retrospectively how some papers to an extraordinary degree managed to "speak to each other" conceptually, thematically, or methodically. Such was this editor's experience too while working on this report. For example, Anderson's argument about subtle yet important differences in Bodding's and Siiger's approaches to autobiographical material is of wider relevance and indirectly speaks to Ruby Hembrom's pertinent and important paper on the Santals and the Bodding Paradox.

Ruby Hembrom, founder and director of Adivaani, took as her main theme Bodding's approach to the Santals' treasure chest of religious and other popular stories, published in the three volume *Santal Folk Tales*, a Santali and English bi-lingual edition.

Hembrom clarified the use of term "the Bodding paradox," arguing the following:

"Thus while Bodding documented our stories as an ethnographer, he showcases a detachment from the real worth or essence of them. Christianity alienated us from our traditional stories. The most impressive and popular work in the Roman Santali is the Bible. The folklore were produced for another people. The bearers and tellers of the stories became objects. The ones facilitating the production of the literature weren't the ones enjoying it.

Who Bodding really documented for is not relevant. Reclaiming our stories and knowledge for the Santal living culture is far more determinant. Reclaiming them in a way we can engage with them, revise them, build on them, should be the ground to a new era for the Bodding manuscripts collection. Maybe then a new generation of storytellers will start disseminating them again."

Hembrom's lines of argument are of great importance given the symposium's aim, i.e. to contribute to a post-colonial era conceived not solely as collaboration (however important that may also be) in terms of access to published and archived manuscripts and objects, but of a profound textual critique, new interpretations, and evidence, based on textual and oral productions in which Adivasi writers and scholars truly lead. Ending her stimulating and consequential paper, Hembrom said:

*"Let the manuscripts sleeping in enclosed boxes and shelves awake; them the lead letters of the press come alive too, let the edifices talk. This is a heritage walk we need to take together and cross together. Bodding's stories are mine too: they are stories of my identify after all. They serve as deep links to my ancestors and my land. In tangible inheritance lies individual and communal memory."*¹⁴

Scholars, writers, access and collaboration

Ruby Hembrom called for "a heritage walk we need to take together." Santosh Soren provided nuanced and extraordinary powerful portraits of two generations of Bodding's "helpers," in reality a diverse group of incredibly accomplished collaborators. Both presentations added to a powerful meta-narrative which helped refine the agenda of the two next sessions.

These two sessions sought to address new opportunities for collaboration between scholars, writers, educators, publishers, museums, and current custodians of the Santals' oral heritage, partly resulting from the ongoing digitization of the vast manuscript collection and the completed digitization of the ethnographic collection. These new opportunities were debated in the context of important developments affecting public memory of this particular enlightenment tradition: cultural rights, divisive language, and educational

¹³ Andersen, p. 9

¹⁴R. Hembrom p. 5

policies, recent trends in research and publishing in South Asia and Scandinavia. The National Library of Norway (NLN), the current custodian of the manuscript collection, cordially hosted the first of these two back-to-back sessions, and in honor of the distinguished participants, the Library had mounted exhibition of rare handwritten manuscripts in the conference hall.

Johanne Ostad from the Dept. of Research and Outreach at NLN welcomed the participants. She introduced the approach to digitizing private collections, observing that not only manuscripts, pictures, and letters stored electronically: she astonished the audience when she informed them that specimens that are more unusual are at times preserved, like for example a dry leaf from 1866! Ostad highlighted certain basic technical and juridical aspects of the digitization process, and observed that the conservation status of the Bodding Collection is mostly good. She continued her talk, providing an overview of the Bodding manuscript collection. In this connection she showcased the invaluable *Santalia Catalogue* written by another symposium participant, Santosh Soren. The remaining part of the talk was devoted to a hands-on presentation of how to access the digitized parts of the impressive Santal collection at the National Library of Norway.

Shilpi Hembrom, Asst. Professor Centre for Human Rights and Conflict Management, at Central University of Jharkhand in Ranchi spoke next on *Bodding's legacy and collaboration*. Her principal focus was on the prospects of future collaborative research.¹⁵

"Rev. Paul Olaf Bodding while staying in The Santal Parganas, has explored in depth the Santal way of living, dusk to dawn; right from birth to death, how men, women and their children are leading their life in joy and sorrow or during normal course of routine affairs. In fact, what we know about Santals today is totally extracted from the work, study, and collections of Rev. Bodding. Accordingly, he may be regarded, as the most renowned ethnographer as far as the tribal people like Santals of the Santal Parganas region are concerned", Hembrom said, introducing her paper.

She reminded the audience that the Scandinavian missionaries had arrived in Santal Parganas at a decisive historical moment. This was less than a decade after *Santal Hul* (1855-56), when the Santals had been massacred and crushed by the well-equipped British army and local collaborators. Rev. Bodding's contributions (building on the seminal work of Lars Skrefsrud) to the Santali language became a most effective tool in rejuvenating the morale of a militarily crushed and spiritually probing people. Her argument, that the Santals saw literacy as a strategic asset in their post-rebellion recovery process, is strikingly similar to Carrin's, made in a previous session.

In the introduction, Hembrom paid tribute to several knowledgeable men and woman, such as medicine men, village chiefs, and other influential persons whom Rev. Bodding befriended. Among them, Hembrom chose to mention Sagram Murmu, Durga Tudu, Mohan Hembrom, Bhaju Murmu, Kanhu Marndi, Somae Murmu, Kandna Soren, Hari Besra, S. Hasdak', Sugri Haram, Dhunu Murmu and Sona Murmu, all trusted collaborators.

Introducing Bodding's major contributions to Indian anthropology as an ethnographer (his vast linguistic legacy notwithstanding), Hembrom highlighted the three-volume *Santal Medicine and Connected Folklore* and his services of several years to the *Anthropological Survey of India*. Substantiating her assessment, Hembrom made reference to publications of several prominent Santal intellectuals, including Dharendra Nath Baskey and Parimal Hembrom among others. Talking to a captivated audience, Hembrom examined

¹⁵ Hembrom, Shilpi, *Bodding's Legacy and Indo-Norwegian Collaboration: Prospect for Research and Investigation*.

the relevance of Bodding's Santal medicine to current innovative research in ethno-pharmacology and clinical trials. Treatments for oral cancer would be a potentially very promising area, she argued. Community/industry partnership could be developed in order to ensure equitable and just partnerships where patents for and royalties from new ethno-medicines were legally ensured and proceeds shared and reinvested.

Hembrom went on to highlight Bodding as ethnomusicologist. His contribution in the form of a rigorous analysis of Santali tunes documented by stave notations should no longer be ignored, Hembrom argued. She called for new innovative approaches combining critical gender-aware re-readings of Santal Folktales with new ethnographic research on Northern and Southern Santals' oral and text-based story traditions. Concluding, Hembrom proposed several important, neglected research topics that remain urgent and relevant to undertake jointly (cf. Annex).

"The Scandinavian - Santal legacy is deep rooted in the Santals of India, Bangladesh, Nepal and elsewhere around the world calls for an inclusive approach for further research and cooperation,"

Joy Raj Eric Tudu said.¹⁶

Tudu, an activist, church leader, and consultant from Santal Parganas continued:

"The ethnographic materials of interest stored in cultural museums, libraries in Norway could pave way for new approaches to promotion of our rich cultural heritage. Dumka, in the Santal Parganas historically as well as in present day is the centre for cultural and intellectual diaspora of the Santals. The Church being the most important custodian of Bodding legacy has to also redefine its role in promoting Santal culture. The Northern Evangelical Lutheran Church (NELC) in the Santal Parganas remains the only custodian of the Bodding legacy; the important places where Bodding lived and did his work. However, there is hardly any tangible thing left to be seen as a living memory in the Mohulpahari Christian Hospital near Dumka in Santal Parganas where Bodding spent most of his time in research and writing.....Where have we failed as a community? Who is responsible for the 'disconnect' with our heritage materials?" Shifting from such a heads-on probing statement, Tudu outlined a participatory, integrated approach and a range of concrete follow-up initiatives (cf. Annex).

In order to broaden participation and capitalize on the proposals to emerge in the concluding session, the debate continued at The Open Forum. Here, participants could visit the stall exhibition area, watch screened documentaries, and join smaller thematic groups. The discussions ranged from how to revitalize scholarship and creative writing and storytelling to publishing strategies and how to stimulate "trans-border" Indo-Bangladeshi-Scandinavian collaboration in advocacy, cultural cooperation, heritage management, and action-research.

Towards a post-colonial and digital era of collection management

This final session addressed the unknown histories of the Santal Bodding Collections in the context of the rise of nineteenth-century ethno-nationalism, indigenous movements, international conventions and postcolonial critiques of "the colonial museum." How is the politics of national and tribal museums and missionary archives impacted by technological innovations – challenging and enabling collections and custodians to redefine their role in society – both in India, Bangladesh and Scandinavia? In which novel ways can ethnographic artifacts, manuscripts and photo archives be stored, owned, and co-managed? How can collections be activated to meet the expectations of different constituencies of original custodians in

¹⁶Tudu, Joy Raj, *Aboak Aidari "Our Heritage": Towards cooperation beyond barriers.*

India, Bangladesh, Nepal, and elsewhere? Can educators' and community involvement through digital communication inform museological practices in new, mutually constructive and sustainable ways?

Professor Tone Bleie, symposium co-organizer and founder of *The Scandinavian-Santal Heritage Initiative* was the first to present a paper at the concluding session. Here she unraveled the extraordinary and largely unknown century-long history of the Santal Bodding Collection. Drawing on new archival and ethnographic evidence, originally gathered for her forthcoming monograph on the Scandinavian-Santal enlightenment heritage,¹⁷ Bleie's paper shifted between historical and contemporary perspectives. She presented a contextualized narrative, informed by ethnography, political history, museum history, and human rights law. Introducing her principal topic, Bleie asked the audience a question she admitted was rhetorical, but not outlandish:

*"What if 'we' did not have on our lands any national museum with master collections? Since this is a reality for the Santals, I discuss if and how they memorize their distant cultural treasures and subsequently how this dispersed nation name and comprehend it. I will touch upon why a trust-based custodianship still exists (even if it is eroding) at a time dominated by rights-based discussion of custodianship. I discuss why the collection's name matters, arguing it ought to reflect the fascinating history of its custodianship, which evolved over a four decade long collection process. It finally led Bodding to announce a custom-based "contract" of access and future return, a binding promise that has largely been overlooked to this day."*¹⁸

The importance of this collection has to be seen against the backdrop of basic demographic realities: Santal is a nation of somewhere between 6 and 7 million people. That is larger than Norway with its 5.1 million and Denmark with 5.6 million, as of 2014. No national or regional museum in India, Bangladesh, or Nepal harbors such a collection of material and immaterial culture – whether measured by comprehensiveness or quality. The Santal Bodding Collection, whose designated name she argued is important, is indeed unparalleled worldwide.

Reflecting on how "a museum" may be most appropriately defined, Bleie suggested that a meaningful definition of the Santal Bodding Collection could be: "a storehouse of ancestral tales and imperishable things." This definition makes good sense in India, Bangladesh and Nepal, and is also comprehensible in Scandinavia, Bleie argued. She placed the account of the Bodding Collection's trajectory in the context of late-nineteenth-century Norwegian nationalism and the cultural history of museums with ethnographic collections. They have arguably in recent decades pursued a selective post-colonial critique, for reasons of Norway's colonial past and selective late-nineteenth-century nationalist narratives. Only Saami demands for their own museums and a say in their management, together with the repatriation of cultural artifacts are slowly being seriously addressed (cf. Leif Pareli's paper). The rethinking of management of these collections in a North–South and rights-based perspective is now possible, aided by international agreements, the ICOM code, digital technology, and the interest of original and current custodians in cooperation. Bleie said, "I am reasonable optimistic that the several months long process of planning and arranging this symposium jointly will bring tangible commitment and institutional resources." Ending her talk, she proposed a number of realistic and innovative options for future collaboration with the Santals and their neighbors from whom the collections derive (cf. Annex).

Jørgen Nørgaard Pedersen, Volunteer Coordinator for the Dan mission Photo Archive (and former General Secretary of the Danish Santal Mission) presented an interesting visual and oral account of the background and process of digitizing the Mission's vast photo archive. His presentation prompted appreciation and several engaged remarks on the importance of this massive effort in a digital repatriation perspective.

¹⁷ Bleie, Tone. *The Santal Bodding Collection: unearthing its history over a century and looking towards the future*.

¹⁸ Bleie, op.cit p. 2.

The despairingly low number of Indian scholars (over the century-long “life” of the collection) who have actually had the opportunity to study the Santal Bodding Collection in Oslo is a disturbing fact to which several participants many alluded during the symposium. It was therefore most appropriate that **Mohan Gautam, Rtd.** Professor from University of Leiden was one of the panelists. A specialist on Tribal India and a noted museologist, Gautam is an Indian social scientist who has spent a considerable time in the ethnographic collection. Prior to the symposium, Gautam’s rare publication, based on his studies in Oslo in the late 1960s and early 1970s was made available on the conference website. In a wide-ranging presentation, Gautam laid out the current politics of tribal museums in India.

There is no dearth of tribal museums in India, as Professor Gautam acknowledged. However, no “national” Santal museum exists either in Delhi (the capital of the federative Indian state) or at the state level in Jharkhand, Assam, or West Bengal. Even local Santal museums are exceptional few in India and not one exists in Bangladesh. We were therefore extremely grateful to the Ghosaldanga Bishnubati Adivasi Trust, West Bengal, which runs a local museum, for agreeing to become one of the partners of the Bodding Symposium 2015. All the more appropriate and exciting was it that **Dr. Boro Baski**, Trustee Member of the Museum of Santal Culture at Bishnubati presented the last paper at the concluding session.¹⁹

Greeting the participants warmly, Baski said he wanted to *discuss* the hurdles Santal culture faces in the present scenario of the nation. He wanted to critically analyze the strategy adopted by two closely linked non-government organizations, the ‘Ghosaldanga Adibasi Seva Sangha’ (GASS) and the ‘Bishnubati Adibasi Marshal Sangha’ (BAMS) of West Bengal, India.

He continued;

“For three decades, we have been working for the preservation and strengthening of Santal culture and tradition because we feel dominated by mainstream Indian culture. The two registered societies which are based in the villages have established a non-formal Santal Primary School, the Rolf Schoembs Vidyashram (RSV). Santal children learn through their mother tongue in the beginning and gradually switch over to the state language, Bengali. Santal myths, history, folklore, dance, music etc. have been included in the curriculum along with the government-designed text books”.

Baski unraveled for a captivated audience how they had established a local Museum of Santal Culture in Bishnubati, maintained by the villagers themselves. In his understanding a main question is how its exhibits like Santal traditional ornaments, hunting tools, musical instruments, medicinal herbs, and traditional utensils can be digitized, perhaps in collaboration with various international museums like the Museum of Cultural History in Norway, may benefit a larger audience and especially he said, *“for future generations of Santals which need to know of their heritage”.*

Baski acknowledged that the concept of a Museum is a new idea among the Santals and that is it also controversial for a number of understandable reasons. There exists certain tensions between Santal culture and modernity, Baski argued and elaborated.

“Santals realize the positive aspects of their culture and the practical utility of the museum’s articles that go with it. But, they find it difficult to adjust to the middle-class aspirations for modern education that India provides. Education and development pose a difficult choice to the Santals – either to be engulfed with compromising their traditional values or to remain socially marginalized.”

¹⁹ Boro Baski, *The Museum of Santal Culture at Bishnubati: Its role in the education and preservation*

Baski unraveled a non-formal education approach aimed at tackling this strained relationship; giving emphasis to a pro-Santal culture curriculum and teaching the two first school years in Santali. In his conclusion, Baski laid out his proposal for a future road map for Scandinavian-Santal collaboration, returning to the museum debate;

“ -should the impact of our museum remain restricted to our own villages? Or can it be extended to reach out to Santals living in other parts of India and Bangladesh? This is when the question of the digitization of the articles and the collaboration with the Museum of Cultural History (MCH) arises. Collaboration with a professional Museum like MCH will benefit us with the ideas, skills and the knowledge about keeping and using a modern museum. It also will encourage others who believe in a museum as an educational tool for disseminating traditional and modern knowledge and skills to the community”.

Concluding his talk, Baski underlined that future collaboration must be firmly reality- grounded, and seek to address the practical necessities and hurdles that might arise in such a new and visionary Scandinavian-Santal venture.