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EDITORIAL NOTE

LIDIA GUZY, MARINE CARRIN, HARALD TAMBS-LYCHE

This special edition of *The Irish Journal of Anthropology* follows the first issue on *Emerging Adivasi and Indigenous Studies in Ireland* (IJA Vol 18 (2) 2015) introducing Adivasi and Indigenous Studies in Ireland. The articles of the second Issue largely derive from a workshop in Toulouse in 2013, and thus reflect the close collaboration that has developed between UCC and the LABEX-SMS of Toulouse.

The issue addresses, in particular, relationships of dominance and subalternity affecting Adivasi and low caste communities in India and Nepal. In the latter country, the indigenous groups, janajatis, actually form the majority of the population. With over 100 million Adivasis and some 250 million ‘ex-untouchables,’ these groups represent a substantial minority in India. Adivasi, janajatis and low caste groups have developed powerful forms of political imagery that challenge the dominant ideologies of both countries as well as of capitalist modernity. This challenge is not new: numerous tribal rebellions broke out in British India during the nineteenth century. They form part of the ideological heritage of these groups today. Some revolts also emerged in Nepal, where the unification of the country from the end of the eighteenth century brought a heavy pressure towards Hinduization.

The authors of this issue look at domination through the lens of marginalised indigenous communities and low caste groups. The articles propose that hegemony must be relativized by the alternative ideologies that emerge through the subaltern struggles. In the context of historical marginalisation, new forms of identity assertions emerge such as literature, religious reforms, ritual reinvention as well as invention of museums.

Hegemony and subalternity

The historians of the subaltern school (Guha 1982-89) have often referred to hegemony when dealing with the caste order. British rule, on the other, was characterised by Ranajit Guha as ‘Dominance without hegemony.’ In this issue, Harald Tambs-Lyche asks whether dominance in the caste order is a case of hegemony in Gramsci’s sense (Gramsci 1971). In his analyses of hegemony Harald Tambs-Lyche reconsiders Brahmanical textual influence and concludes that the hegemony of the Hindu texts did not conform with local situations of dominance. Criticising Dipesh Chakrabarty for assuming the communitarian organisation of Calcutta’s working class to be a ‘pre-capitalist’ survival, Tambs-Lyche suggests that communitarian values should be seen as dialectically opposed to the dominant capitalist paradigm, as ‘anti-capitalist.’ The argument is that hegemony, in Gramsci’s sense of an overarching ideology that sets the limits for any alternative expression, can never be absolute in the caste order. This is particularly true since subalterns are organised in communities, and: as long as subaltern communities persist, hegemony is a relative matter.

Exploitation, land rights, and identity assertion

Since the colonial period the question of land-rights has been crucial for Indian Adivasis. Attempts to regain lost lands have provoked successive rebellions from 1832 to 1905. Stressing that these forms of resistance and rebellion, as alternative forms of identity assertion, must be ‘understood and analysed on the basis of the specific histories of individual communities,’ Sanjukta Das Gupta deals with the agrarian claims and insurrections of the Ho of Chotanagpur, as well as with the legal frameworks imposed by the British. She argues that the Chotanagpur Tenancy act intended to protect Adivasi land tenures produced different results for the various indigenous groups of the area. Unlike the Munda and Santal, who continued to lose land, the Ho, with their internal stratification and strong leadership, succeeded in negotiating a settlement through redefining their past, reshaping their identity, and developing a subaltern agency which allowed them to retain most of their land as well as their social organisation and polity.

Visualizing memories

In his article, Daniel Rycroft addresses the problem of cultural heritage and its construction. Dealing with the cultural interface between Adivasis and post-colonial governance, he redefines heritage as ‘looking both ways’ – from the community outwards as well as the outsider’s gaze. His exploration of this interface between the archive and the portraiture, focuses on representations of Birsa Munda, the leader of the *uligan* or Munda rebellion of the 1890s. Birsa is perceived both as a prophet by the Munda and as a ‘freedom-fighter’ in the larger society of Jharkhand. Exploring the visualisation of Birsa Munda, he defines the successive representations of Birsa as a chiasmic archive of different encounters and memories. He further shows that this archive, which engages with past rebellion, succeeds in re-invigorating the ethnographic present. This archive has an empowering effect by articulating lost memory to the ethnographic present.

Emergence of a new ethnic identity

When the kingdom of Sikkim was integrated into the Indian Union in 1975, the old order was disbanded and Sikkim became a state of the Indian Union. These political changes created the conditions for Limbu identity assertion. Mélanie Vandenhelsken explores the emergence of a separate Limbu identity, distancing itself from ‘Nepaliness’ since the Limbu settlement straddled the border between Nepal and Sikkim. She discusses the part taken by the

Sikkimese Limbu in the trans-border Kiranti movement, and shows how Limbu activism developed through literature and script. Then, from the late 1980s, as a response to state policy, the emphasis of Limbu activism moved to rituals and religion. Activists succeeded in reforming 'Limbu religion' by referring to the teachings of the ascetic Phalgunanda Lingden (1885–1949), and to redefine their religious practice as 'Yumaism.' Later, the writer J. R. Subbha furnished Yumaism with a philosophical base, reminiscent of Christianity and Neo-Hinduism.

When the Indian government declared all Sikkim ethnic groups to be Scheduled Tribes in 1994, Limbu religious activity shifted from house and village to community temples which became visible markers of the ethnic community.

Oral literature as a space of resistance

Marie Lecomte-Tilouine writes on the myth of golden hair, as told by the Magar of Nepal. It tells of the marriage of a beautiful Magar girl, and is found in different versions among various groups. In the Magar narrative the girl refuses an alliance which would separate her from her brother, and she leaves this world, ascending to the sky. Lecomte-Tilouine argues that the story stresses the importance of sisterhood and brotherhood by ensuring the endogamy of the group.

The Magars still practised matrilateral cross-cousin marriage in the 1980s, which protected the group from losing their female members through marriage to high-caste men. In the Hinduised version of the myth, however, the girl with the golden hair accepts marriage with a stranger, and mistreats and sends away her brother. Tribal identity is comforted by modifying Hindu narratives to take on a mythological dimension. Through these myths the Magar have found a new way to define the symbolic cohesion of Magar society. Among the Magar oral narrative provides a space of freedom and resistance against the hegemony of the dominant group, more precisely against high caste men who had sexual commerce with Magar women or took them as partners in a secondary marriage.

The politics of identity deployed by a subaltern caste

In South India (Karnataka) the Billava (once Untouchable toddy-tappers), were formerly excluded from the temples and patronised by the high castes. Many Billavas were converted to Protestantism from around 1830: they acquired education and improved their economic status. But in the 1950s, the cult of the bhutas which had declined found a new impulsion, inspiring peasant resistance. Today, the issue, for the Billava and other subaltern communities, is to democratise the bhuta cult, which was linked to the old Tulu chiefdoms.

Marine Carrin's article focuses on the death of the twin Billavas heroes Koti and Chennaya who are worshipped in special temples called garodis, gymnasiums where the Billava commemorate their martial past and perform their rites of passage. The garodis have been reformed in recent years, a movement been inspired by Billava intellectuals who stress that these places of worship exemplify equality and resistance.

The Billava museum, which is a community museum, aims at staging and representing the struggle of the Billava community. In this museum the glorious death of the Billava heroes are given a special visibility through statues and paintings. But while the Billava elites continue to make alliances with higher castes, the poor are still oppressed by the high castes and the Hindu right.

Staging identity – Musealization of Adivasi culture

In various parts of India, different ethnic and cultural communities endeavour to express their histories and present way of life through the medium of museums. Sometimes, the state supports these projects, which also attract intellectual activists and artists.

In her article, Lidia Guzy deals with the Museum of Mankind in Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh which represents the tangible and intangible heritage of subaltern communities of India in the context of a State institution. This museum is unique since it offers an inclusive approach by integrating members of local minority communities, who live nearby, to design and curate the permanent and temporary exhibitions. Her second example, the Museum of Voice in Gujarat, was started by the activist Ganesh Devy. Here, too, the minority communities exhibit their own culture in their own way, seconded by other cultural activities such as schools and an Academy for languages which sponsors Advasi literature and other artistic expressions.

In his article, Stefano Beggiora examines a funeral dance of the Soara in Odisha, which traditionally is a renewal of the alliance between the living and the dead, but today changes rapidly on stage in the context of the contemporary performances held on the occasion of the capital's state sponsored tribal festival (Ādivāsī Melā). Today, the funeral dance in the metropolis Bhubaneswar becomes a yearning for identity on the part of an indigenous culture that is endangered by market forces and modernization.

This new visibility has brought to Adivasi art the problems of commercialisation and market demands, while attempts to include Adivasi art in modern art exhibitions have tended to perpetuate the perception of indigenous artists as exotic others.

This issue is supplemented by an interview with Paul Hockings, whose monumental work on the Badagas of the Nilgiri Hills will be known to many readers: he also talks of his pioneering work in visual anthropology. Finally, there is a comment on the future of caste by Harald Tambs-Lyche.

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MANAGING EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

MÁIRE NÍ MHÓRDHA

As incoming Managing Editor of the *Irish Journal of Anthropology*, it is with great pleasure that I introduce this follow-on issue on Emerging Adivasi an Indigenous Studies in Ireland, which brings together a rich collection of papers, highlighting the important collaboration between UCC and LABEX-SMS.

The Journal is the fruit of a collaborative, creative process, and I'm grateful to be working with or following on from the many people who have given of their time, energy and experience to the Journal to the date, in particular Fiona Larkan, as well as our General Editor, James Cuffe, who has been unstinting in his solid and cheerful support as I found my feet with this issue, in addition to the many years of tireless work he has dedicated to the Journal. I'm delighted that we will benefit from Steve Coleman's experience as he stays on to lead the IJA Advisory Board. Lidia Guzy and Harald Tambs-Lyche have provided much to the Journal in recent years and will lend their expertise to the Advisory Board going forward. Thanks also to Lobna Abulhassan, our new Digital Editor for her energy and ideas. I look forward to working with James, Lobna, Ela, Sitara, Jill, and the assistant editors, to build on the Journal's consistent commitment to excellence in scholarship that has allowed it to establish a reputation beyond its geographical and disciplinary remit, and to develop its structure and content to ensure the Journal's position in the forefront of anthropology in Ireland and beyond.

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Cover Photo: *Lidia Guzy, 2010*
Location: *Contemporary Santal Jadopatia scroll painting of Bengal, Kolkata*

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COMMENT ON

WILL INDIA HAVE TO LIVE WITH CASTE FOR ALL TIME TO COME?

BY HARALD TAMBS-LYCHE

In his critique of A.M. Shah's essay, 'Division and Hierarchy,' I.P. Desai, that grand old man of Gujarat sociology, asked the question I have taken as my title (1988: 80). Shah had stated that 'castes are not likely to cease to be castes in the foreseeable future' (ibid.). Desai argued that new, secular constellations of interest groups were gradually eroding the ideology of caste, and must one day bring about the end of the institution, although this would still take time. Desai was one of those scholars who saw caste as fading away with the influence of modernity.

That was almost thirty years ago. So far, and well into the 'foreseeable future,' Shah seems to have been right: caste is still strongly present in Indian society, as the recent agitations of Jats and Patidars for OBC status show. Yet most of the trends cited by Desai are equally present. The simplest way to tackle this paradoxical situation is to reiterate that such changes take time. This is not what I shall do here. Instead, I ask the question – what aspects of caste do 'we' really want to disappear, and what aspects are 'we' quite happy to live with? The 'we,' here, is meant to indicate those, like Desai, who want Indian society to develop towards more equality, democracy and social justice. I include myself, not an Indian, but deeply involved in the question after more than forty years of research on the subject.

There are many sides to caste. I shall concentrate on three, which I term (1) the community aspect (Ghurye 1932: 179), (2) the stratification aspect (sometimes seen as 'class') and (3) the hierarchical aspect, which I identify with a particular ideology, to distinguish it from other aspects of stratification. Why I choose these, and why I see them as distinct, will be discussed below.

Ghurye said that members of a caste 'owed moral allegiance to their caste first' (1932: 3), and thus 'ceased to be members of the community as a whole' (ibid.: 4). This is why – looking at caste from the perspective of society as a whole – this dimension has been called 'separation' or 'division.' Ghurye also pointed out that many castes ruled their internal affairs through councils, which is why Shodhan (2003) deemed pre-colonial caste to be a 'polity,' not just a community. I have argued elsewhere (forthcoming) that communities in India possess, through caste, an organisational tool for furthering their interests which is lacking in less communitarian societies, where new groupings may have to form whenever their interests are at stake. This is why Jaffrelot (2005) talks of democracy by caste. At the same time, members of a caste may find that individual expression suffers from community pressure.

We have here four levels: at the highest, castes are seen as divisive of national unity: at the next level, this very lack of unity may be seen as an expression of democracy; on the level of the group, caste is a source of co-operation and solidarity, while at the lowest level, caste may be seen as a brake on individual expression. At each level there is a dialectical opposite to these statements: seen from above, the presence of communities may render communication and mobilisation, initiated by the state, more effective: at the middle level the existence of multiple groups with similar interests may be divisive, as when class unity is seen to suffer; and at the lowest level, community controls on the individual also imply a sense of belonging and identity that may be lacking in a more amorphous society. None of this is new, but I want to stress that caste can be viewed both positively and negatively at each level – individual, group and society. It is less than obvious, then, that individuals, groups or even the Indian nation should want to 'abolish' this aspect of caste, and we do not find evident grounds, here, for the disappearance of caste unless we stick to a determinist model of modernity.

Stratification is a different matter. Nobody would deny that differences between rich and poor are enormous in India. But if we look at statistical indices, we find that some countries, like Brazil, have far higher concentrations around the top and bottom poles of the income curve: the Indian curve has a much larger proportion of people in the middle. We also know that a single caste may include people whose income and resources spread over a very wide range. This is not to deny that average incomes tend to correlate with the position of the caste, but, as several scholars have argued, it does imply that caste is not simply a 'frozen' form of stratification. Historically, and no less so in recent times, castes have risen considerably on the economic scale, while others have fallen. It may even be argued that economic development, to some extent, is weakening the link between economic stratification and caste. This strengthens the argument that reforms to promote greater economic equality do not directly depend on, and may not even affect, caste as an institution.

The third dimension is hierarchy, which I take here to be an ideological phenomenon. As such it depends on a model of society shared by its members. When Dumont made the concept popular (1966/1970) he explored the implications of a model that puts the Brahmin at the apex of society. But, as Quigley (1994) and others have argued, and Raheja (1988) shows conclusively at the level of one village, we must allow for an alternative, king-centred model – which, today, puts the locally dominant caste in the central position. I have argued (2017) that we must add a model where the merchant castes, seen as responsible for economic and material reproduction of society, is the node around which hierarchy is imagined. I maintain that these models must be historically situated and that their relative influence has changed over time (1997, 2017). The various hierarchical models thus emerge as ideologies of particular interest groups – Brahmins, dominant 'warrior' castes, and merchants – which have vied with each other for hegemony. They cannot be conceived, as Dumont did, as explicatory models of how Indian society works.

Once we admit the ideological status of these models, Indian society emerges as an arena for conflicting ideologies, a demystification which opens the way for imagining other, alternative visions of society, such as an egalitarian one. Hierarchy ceases to be an intrinsic feature of Indian society, and becomes, in principle, as contestable as any other ideology.

My principal point here is to contribute to a deconstruction of a monolithic notion of caste. Indians are certainly not 'doomed' to live with caste forever. But they – or 'we' are likely to have different views regarding each of the three aspects of caste I discussed above. Not everybody, I am sure, would really like to 'abolish' the community aspect of caste – quite apart from the question of how, and by whose agency, it would be possible to do so. Prohibiting caste associations would not work: any association may function to further caste interests, if one caste group controls it.

On the other hand, efforts to create greater economic equality and justice do not, in principle, depend on caste, and while the efficient organization of the stronger castes does complicate their implementation, egalitarian reforms are opposed by the dominant everywhere, whether the societies they dominate are organised by caste or not.

The question of what is happening to hierarchy - which Shah saw as declining gradually, and Desai as declining fast (1988: 46) is another matter. I do not agree that this dimension is disappearing, but would rather suggest that it is changing. Is there no hierarchy in the West? Bourdieu (1990) certainly did not agree to that, nor did Veblen (1899). Hierarchy, indeed, would seem to part of any ideology which put the dominant at the apex of society.

In Indian films, the dominant generally is a man wearing an expensive suit and a tie, seen to control an important enterprise, with lots of money. The corresponding figure in Western films is strangely similar. A cultural veneer smacking of high caste (in India) or 'high' family background (in the West) may be present, but in both regions pedigree is becoming more and more implicit. It is as if we move, in India as in the West, towards a hierarchy implied by the neo-liberal economic order, with old family and high caste fading away in the background. When a powerful manager speaks, we do not ask who his father was. In India today, the boss may be an ex-untouchable or even, though rarely, a tribal. Tomorrow there might be more such bosses, if egalitarian policies could succeed in reducing the stratification aspect of caste. How much does it matter, then, that the ex-untouchable boss marries an ex-untouchable wife – preferably the daughter of another ex-untouchable boss, of course?

What I want to stress is that hierarchy is an ideological matter, and as such open to conflicting interpretations and to political intervention. Yet it may be hierarchy, rather than caste, that is oppressive. True, attempts at hegemony tend to produce resistance, as Scott argued (1985). Resistance does not explode the hierarchical order, but I suggest that 'we' should work towards a society which leaves the community aspect of caste alone, while we should strive for greater socio-economic equality and a less hierarchical ideological order.

Maybe this is what I.P. had in mind when, as a young anthropologist, I came to see him in 1973. 'You Westerners,' he said, 'are all obsessed by caste. There is so much else that is important in India.' Maybe he was right: caste may not be the problem. Inequality and oppression is.

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ARTICLE

DOMINATION BY HEGEMONY, OR FORCE COUNTERED BY RESISTANCE? THE INDIAN CASTE ORDER BETWEEN SCOTT AND GRAMSCI

BY HARALD TAMBS-LYCHE

Abstract: The Indian caste order has been seen as sustained by a dominant Brahmin ideology penetrating the conscience of the dominated. This view was crucial to Dumont's work, and influenced even the subalternists, making Indian society appear as a case of Gramscian hegemony. Anthropologists working on untouchables, however, have argued that these populations interpret the system in their own way. If we take castes as separate communities with distinct subcultures, we might well argue that no stratified society provides as complete a set of preconditions for hidden transcripts and for resistance, in Scott's terms, as India does. In this paper, I explore the possibilities for integrating Scott's and Gramsci's views in a single approach. I shall support my argument by examples from Chakrabarty's study of working-class consciousness, and from my own work in Saurashtra and on the Kanara coast.

Keywords: India, Caste, Community, Hegemony, Resistance

Introduction

This paper explores the questions of domination, hegemony and resistance in the Indian caste order. The term 'order' is deliberate here: it implies a refusal to analyse caste as a 'system.' Caste has tended to be seen in terms of two distinct paradigms (U. Sharma 1999). One, elaborated by Dumont (1966), interprets caste by way of a holistic view of society, in which each caste has its allotted place. Here, Brahmin texts, with their particular ideology, is seen as concomitant with *the* ideology of caste, and Brahmins stand forth as the ideologists of the dominant (Berreman 1970). This is a statement about culture or ideology: society is seen as incarnating a mode of thought. This implies consensus, since it is the shared ideological precepts that integrate the whole.

The other paradigm, central to Western sociology, sees caste as one particular form resulting from transcultural processes that produce stratification, notably those relating to power, economics, and the struggle for resources. This struggle, integral to the paradigm, implies a conflict model of society, with Weber (1948) as the obvious classical reference. This second paradigm, at least in its pure positivist form, is seen as beyond ideology, thought, or culture. In the first paradigm, then, caste becomes a 'system,' in the second, a stratified 'order' which may be compared with other such 'orders,' as in the contrast, now largely defunct, which opposed 'caste' to 'class.'

My argument is closely related to these paradigms. If the caste order is imagined as a holistic model of society shared by its members, it becomes crucial to ask whether this consensus is real, and if so, how it is maintained. Since we are talking of Brahmin texts, this would mean that

'Indians' – an inexcusably simplistic term - share a view of the social system propagated by the dominant. To the extent that Brahmin ideas of caste pervade Indian society, we have a clear instance of hegemony in Gramsci's sense of the term (1971).

Since the second paradigm claims to transcend thought, we should have no need, if we follow it, to imply anything at all about ideology. It may indeed be possible to analyse social stratification in India solely in terms of economic and political factors. For Bailey (1961), the main difference was that social stratification was 'closed,' with no mobility between castes in India, while it was thought to be 'open,' with mobility between classes, in the West.

But this leaves us with no explanation of how or why 'caste' becomes different from 'class': we are unable to explain the specificity of India. One alternative, here, close to traditional Marxist approaches (Mukherjee 1957, 1999), is to see 'caste ideology' as a 'superstructure' to the economic and political 'base.' But if 'ideology' has such an impact on the form of a society whose 'real dynamics' are similar to other societies, then that ideology must indeed be influential. Our effort to produce a value-neutral, universalist, theory of caste leads us back to square one: the apparently hegemonic influence of Brahmin and caste ideology.

There is, however, a third approach, crucial to my argument here. This is to see India as a pluricultural society, as, in fact, has been done when scholars study a single caste as a community.[1] In this light, India becomes a land of countless minorities, without any clear majority group. Indeed, early 'catalogues' of 'tribes and castes'[2] described the culture of each caste or tribe as if they were separate ethnic groups. Such a view is unhelpful in explaining how these groups act together to form a society. It does, however, usefully question the notion of a single, overarching ideology of caste. Indeed, if each caste has an autonomous culture and its own view of the system (Gupta 2000), there would seem to be little scope for hegemony on a cross-caste level.

Yet, as Parsons (1961) stated most bluntly, a degree of ideological consensus is needed for society to function. We may oppose this functionalist view from conflict theory, and see society as an arena for conflicting ideologies, but we must still allow for a shared language, or code, in which these ideologies express themselves. This implies shared paradigms of discourse, though not necessarily conscious to the participants in the discourse.

Conflict is certainly present in India. When I worked in Saurashtra in the 1970s and 1980s, raids by high caste men on the low-caste quarters of the village were quite common.[3] Whenever agricultural labour grumbled about low wages, it was thought expedient to burn their houses, rape some of their women and kill a few of the men. Such coercion, quite commonplace in India, would, it was said, calm things down for a while. Dollard similarly tells us how Whites in the American Deep South commented on the need for and the positive effect of periodic lynching of Blacks (1937). There, as in India, the dominant stressed the harmonious nature of society. Here I do not deal with coercion as such, but ask whether, in the Indian caste order, hegemony provides an ideological persuasion that to some extent replaces coercion (Guha 1989).

The question of hegemony

But what should we mean by hegemony? Are we simply talking of the ideology of the dominant? Then we must accept the possibility of counter-ideologies, as the dominated realize that the ideas of the dominant run counter to their own interests. A simple majority opinion hardly constitutes what Gramsci meant by hegemony, if minority expressions remain largely independent of, as well as opposed to, majority views.

Guha (1989) poses the paired concepts of coercion and persuasion as constitutive of dominance. He defines hegemony as a state of dominance where persuasion outweighs coercion, so that the dominated tend to accept their subjection as part of a hegemonic paradigm. Guha's argument is that colonial rule depended on coercion far more than persuasion, and he goes on to show the important element of discipline in Gandhi's leadership and control of popular protest. He argues that neither Gandhi nor the Congress succeeded in taming what was, to him, a relatively autonomous, subaltern revolt. Independent India, then, like the colonial state, was founded on 'dominance without hegemony.'

This makes hegemony a matter of degree, depending on the relative force of coercion and persuasion. I suggest, as the crucial shifter on this scale, that hegemony obtains where the dominated, or most of them, are unable to transcend the hegemonic paradigm to formulate an alternative ideology.[4] If we assume karmic theory – that the sins of past lives explain low status (Kolenda 1964) - to be accepted by the untouchable himself, we have a paradigm that is not transcended, indicating the existence of hegemony.

The prevalence of karmic theory is, indeed, a widespread common-sense assumption about caste society. The problem, in practice, is that karmic ideology, though widely known in India, is not accepted by everybody – and often rejected, precisely, by untouchables and other low castes. Here, then, hegemony again becomes a relative matter, dependent on individual and group beliefs. Several authors (Berreman 1961, 1973: Khare 1984) cite informants as stating that karmic ideology is a Brahmin invention, that it is an argument designed to keep the dominated in their place, and that no rational low-status person can (or should) believe it.

Clearly we must distinguish between dominant ideology as such, and a situation where hegemony obtains. Neither must be confused with a simple majority view. But even if we accept my definition of the 'crucial shifter' above, we are faced with the problem of relativity: how many accept the paradigm, how many reject it? Clearly we can never know this precisely, and hegemony must remain a relative matter, a matter of degree.

Hegemony versus community in working-class history

Such relativity runs counter to Marx's view in the Grundrisse, where he seems to expect the logic of capital to transform all social relations radically, creating new conditions for thinking about society and the individual, conditions that would destroy all 'pre-capitalist' or 'pre-bourgeois' thought (Bottomore and Rubel 1963). This would mean, as Chakrabarty (1989) underlines, that the new class consciousness, born of capitalist society, is radically different from pre-capitalist solidarities, based on community.[5] Such a radical transformation would constitute near-absolute hegemony, conditions where socialist thought must be – by dialectic opposition - the child of the logic of capital.

But Chakrabarty wants to 'isolate questions of culture and consciousness where the assumption of a hegemonic bourgeois culture does not apply,' since the logic of a particular culture cannot be explained by political economy. Central, to Chakrabarty, are the inequalities that form part of the 'quotidian experience' of life in India, and which show no signs of disappearing with capitalism (1989, xii-xiii), as Marx once thought and as other 'modernists' expected them to do - assuming that caste as a 'traditional' institution would fade away before the forces of modernity.

Chakrabarty wants to establish the existence of a 'pre-bourgeois' culture among Calcutta jute workers from around 1890 to 1940. His argument turns on the question of work discipline. As Marx put it, under capitalism 'the place of the slave-driver's lash is taken by the overlooker's book of penalties,' so that punishment is by means of fines and wage deductions (Capital, vol.1: 423-24). Discipline, for Marx, was necessary for production, due to the rhythm of the machines, as was supervision to ensure regular work. But discipline entails authority, which was never 'a one-sided affair' for Marx (Chakrabarty 1989: 67- 68).[6] Thus 'a particular form of authority' says Chakrabarty, 'implies a particular cultural formation producing and supporting it.' Discipline becomes part of working-class culture, and is one way in which bourgeois hegemony is exercised. But that is why, says Chakrabarty, 'it can be used as a measure of how different capitalism in colonial Bengal was from the paradigm developed by (Marx)' (op. cit.: 69).

Authority and supervision in Calcutta's jute industry differed substantially from the form found in Britain. Domination here did not resemble the technically informed supervision Marx held as typical of industry. Technology was simple and stagnant, labour plentiful and cheap, and millowners were concerned to keep it so. Quality of work was of little account. This was the background for the Sardar system, where each department was 'ruled' by an indigenous intermediary responsible for the recruitment, supervision, discipline and dismissal of workers. The Sardars claimed a fee from the worker for recruitment: often, he owned housing or had links to those who did: sometimes, he owned the shop in which 'his' workers bought their provisions. Sardars lent money to workers, for example when out of work. The Sardar, then, was an ubiquitous kind of authority with a wide range of powers over 'his' workers (Chakrabarty 1989: 96-114). Above him, only the managers could be applied to: they, in turn, tried to project a paternal image, as the mabap – 'mother-and-father' – of the workers. Chakrabarty stresses how this ties in with traditional forms of authority in India - the king was the archetypal 'mabap' (1989: 163-66). We are far from the contractual arrangements of bourgeois society.

Sardars tended to recruit workers from their own community or from other groups they knew well, and the communitarian structure of the working class was clearly visible during conflicts between Hindus and Muslims, or between Bengalis and 'immigrants.' Though outsiders may have encouraged such conflicts, these efforts could succeed only since these loyalties already formed a crucial part of the workers' culture. And while unions and workers' organisations progressed from 1890 to 1940, they never overcame the ethnic, caste, and religious divisions (Chakrabarty 1989: 186-212).

Traditional forms of authority and 'primordial' ties are the main elements of what Chakrabarty sees as a pre-capitalist working class culture (1989: 212-213). But when he opposes working class consciousness in Calcutta to Marx's technically informed view of supervision, he compares a 'real' situation to an ideal model. Does domination, in European or any other capitalism, really correspond to the ideal of contractual arrangements and bourgeois hegemony? Chakrabarty's view of Calcutta's working class culture strangely resembles the dominant view: stuck in communitarian relations and traditional Indian views of authority, the workers have not developed a 'mature' class consciousness.

The moot question is how we should see the relation between hegemonic and dominated culture. Is the latter penetrated by, and basically a reflection of, the former, or is it, rather, in opposition to it, within a hierarchical order where the dominated are encompassed by, but expressing a dialectical negation to, dominant values? Is working-class culture pre-bourgeois, or is it rather anti-bourgeois?

To understand bourgeois hegemony over working-class consciousness in the West, we need more substance than we find in Marx's ideal model. Chakrabarty does not compare his material to writers on Western working-class history, such as Thompson (1963), whose main theme, in 'The Making of the English Working Class,' was precisely how such consciousness came about. Indeed, Thompson and other writers on Western working-class culture[7] start from a pre-bourgeois culture. If we turn to sociological or anthropological studies of modern working-class culture, we do not see 'bourgeois hegemony' manifested in a focus on contractual relations. Rather, such relations are opposed by those that sustain community, both in its 'primordial' and its wider sociological sense. The 'urban villagers' of Bethnall Green (Young and Willmott 1957) may have lived in a 'pre-capitalist' setting in the fifties, but the Ashford coalminers (Dennis, Henriques and Slaughter 1956) did not. Rather than penetrate working-class culture with contractual values, bourgeois hegemony seems to provoke a 'counter-culture' where these very values are denied. Tönnies (1932), indeed, saw the labour movement as reinstating 'Gemeinschaft' in a society dominated by 'Gesellschaft'. The conclusion must be that Chakrabarty's view of domination by hegemony is too simple.

While Chakrabarty (1989: 219) stresses the independence of 'culture' from 'politics' and 'economy,' he reifies culture. The very notion of 'community' is seen as 'pre-bourgeois,' and opposed to a 'bourgeois order' characterized by ideas of 'citizenship, equal rights, equality before the law, and the like' (1989: 219). Of course he criticises these modernist concepts, as having produced neither equality nor freedom for all. Chakrabarty is certainly right in stressing that class consciousness is embedded in culture, but he fails to see that the communitarian structure of working-class culture is characterised, in the West as in India, by its opposition to the 'liberal' values of the bourgeoisie. While the latter are general, however, 'community' can only exist in concrete relationships, different from one culture to another, producing some of the strengths as well as weaknesses in the 'class consciousness' we actually observe.

This discussion of working-class culture and consciousness leads us to two main points. One is that we must be wary of inferring hegemony from an analysis 'from above' – even when done by Marx or

Chakrabarty – since the answer to questions of hegemony must be based in the culture of the dominated. The second point is that the existence of communities among the latter is crucial to a sustained formulation of counter-hegemonic views.

Dominance and the caste order

Let me now return to the question of hegemony in the caste system. A thoroughly hegemonic, holistic view of caste as a total social system would imply that any view opposed to the dominant Brahmanical one would be dialectically encompassed – in Dumont's terms – in its opposition to the former: it would have to be formulated within the paradigmatic presuppositions of the dominant view, as exemplified by caste ideologies that accept a hierarchical caste order, but argues for a higher position, within that order, of the caste in question. This is, of course, a common claim in Indian discourse, and such examples seem to show the hegemony of the dominant view of caste. On the other hand, if low-caste views negate these paradigmatic presuppositions, we have, in effect, what Guha (1989) calls dominance without hegemony. When low-caste people deny karmic reasoning, they are negating at least one such precept. When they are claiming that one man is as good as any other, they are negating another fundamental presupposition of the brahminical model of caste. To question this hegemony, I shall set out five ways of viewing dominance and resistance with regard to the caste order, as follows.

First, we may see traditional caste ideology as hegemonic, constituting a paradigm which subalterns – here, the lower castes – are unable to transcend. Any resistance or sub-cultural dissent would then be seen as encompassed within caste ideology.

Second, what I would call a 'modernist' position would assume that the middle-class, bourgeois culture we identify with modernity is, indeed, hegemonic in India to-day, and that subaltern sub-cultures are but slowly dying residues of a traditional order.[8]

Third, we may consider Guha's view, that the modern state is trying, unsuccessfully, to impose a bourgeois hegemony comparable to what exists in the West. This relegates caste ideology – 'casteism' in Indian parlance – to subaltern status, though it still enjoys considerable autonomy and denies hegemony to the bourgeois state.

Fourth, there is the position that would follow from Gupta's view (2000), that each caste, or cluster of castes, constitutes an autonomous culture – which would make of each community a perfect locus for the kind of resistance Scott (1985) talks about. This would seem to make sustained hegemony impossible. Dominance, in such a system, would be either by coercion or, which seems a reasonable view of the Indian state today, by a complex policy of compromise trying to ride above the contradictions of a complex society, sustained by force when necessary. Hegemony would, then, be relegated to a secondary role.

What I propose here is as a fifth view, borrowing from each of the above, but differing from them on other points. India, here, is seen as a multicultural society, where attempts at establishing ideological hegemony by the dominant appear all through the history of the caste order. But in spite of two millennia of such efforts, complete hegemony has never been established. Because of the communitarian structure that caste lends to society, and the relative ideological autonomy of these communities, this quest for hegemony has never succeeded in quelling the various forms of resistance. It follows that my proposition needs to be sustained from an analysis of history as well as from the present.

A view from history

There is ample evidence for a complex, stratified society in India well before the classical age (about 300 A.D. to 300 C.A.). Some writers see an unbroken line of stratified society developing from the Indus Civilisation: others see the beginnings of ethnic stratification in the 'Aryan conquest.' By the time the founders of Buddhism and Jainism lived (6th to 5th century B.C.) the society was certainly both stratified and complex. However, although the Buddhist Jatakas mention a number of occupational and ethnic groups, there is no evidence that these constituted the kind of hierarchical order we call caste (Jaiswal 2005).

Indeed, the first comprehensive statement of caste ideology, seeing the whole of society as an integrated system, is the Manusmrti – the laws of Manu – which appears as a text in the last two hundred years B.C., or possibly a little later.[9] The ideology of caste, then, is not at the origin of Indian social stratification. It was imposed on a society which was already stratified and highly complex (Tambs-Lyche 2017: 50-51).

I choose to see the ideology of the Manusmrti as a Brahminical 'manifesto,' trying to impose a hegemonic order on a confusingly complex societal organisation (Tambs-Lyche 2016: 51). It should be noted that the text appears in a period of political unrest, a matter much discussed in the Puranas – also Brahminical texts – of the time, indeed a period when society, according to R.S. Sharma, was entering a stage of feudalism, which he identifies as the 'Kali age' (R.S. Sharma 2002, Yadava 2002). There are plaints in the Puranas that Brahmins are no longer respected, and that there is widespread disorder in what should have been an ordered hierarchy of castes.

My main point here, is that the Manusmrti cannot be read as a description of society as it was at the time, but should be seen, rather, as a kind of utopic statement about how society should have been ordered, according to a brand of Brahminical thought. At the same time, the evidence of the Puranas show that social realities, at the time, did not conform to the norms of the Manusmrti. Clearly, the hegemony that the text was supposed to imply was highly relative.

Basham held that many of the caste norms current later, regarding such matters as occupation and commensality, were not yet followed as late as the 8th or 9th century C.A., and in some cases only much later (Basham 1954: 148). Thus we are well into the middle ages before the ideas of the Manusmrti can be said to have gained a hegemonic position. Dirks (2001) maintains, more radically, that the ideological influence of the Manusmrti was limited, until the British 'discovered' the text as a main source of 'traditional Indian law.' Susan Baily (1999) points to the rapidly increasing Brahmin influence in the Hindu 'successor states' that formed with the decline of the Mogul empire in the 18th century, implying that their influence was less important in earlier times. For Dirks and Baily, then, any hegemony ascribed to the Manusmrti's caste ideology would rather belong to the modern age.

My point here is simple: the central tenets of hierarchical caste ideology were imposed on a society which did not conform to its norms, and its rise towards a hegemonic status has been a process of some two millennia. I shall now turn to regional history to examine this process in more detail.

Interpreting Saurashtra's history

In 'Power, Profit and Poetry' (1997) I tried to sketch crucial lines in the history of Saurashtra, a peninsula in Gujarat, North-Western India, from about 800 to 1800 A.D. The main theme here is the opposition between a cluster of castes centred on agriculture, territory and warfare based in the countryside, and another, mainly based in the towns, constituted by the merchant castes. In 788 or 789 (BDG: 50-55) the kingdom of Vallabhi, based in the town of that name in Eastern Saurashtra, collapsed. This had been a state which, like earlier state formations in 'classical' India, was based mainly on trade. The merchant communities constituted a main pillar of the society over which the kings ruled, and although Brahmins were present, it is clearly the merchant communities that dominate urban culture. Buddhism and Jainism, both marked by the value of non-violence, were the most important religions among Vallabhi merchants at the time. I do not wish to state that 'caste' was absent from this order – at least one of the still influential Brahmin castes is documented from this period – but with the Buddhist and Jain influence, the influence of the Brahminical strain of caste ideology must have been limited. Karmic ideology, however, which probably derives from Buddhist and Jain ideas, may well have been influential.

While territories close to the capital were controlled and taxed, with urban landowners holding part of the land, most of the territory dominated by Vallabhi must still have been inhabited by 'tribals,' and the main interest of the state would have been – as in Ashoka's empire about a thousand years earlier – in the security of the trade routes. The tribal populations probably claimed loyalty to the ruler and may have paid tribute in some form, but their main function in the state would have been to let traders pass peacefully through their domains.

Around and after the fall of Vallabhi there are several centuries of immigration, with several new communities arriving in the peninsula: there was considerable growth of the rural population, and as the kingdom fell, political control shifted to minor chiefs in the countryside. Gradually, from about 800 to 1400, these chiefdoms took on a feudal form, and the caste we now know as Rajputs emerged. They did not depend on Brahmins for their legitimation: with the Rajput caste emerges, simultaneously, a caste of bards, the Charans, who were at once the genealogists of the chiefs and their most important sacred agents. The religion of the Rajputs was centred on a new class of Goddesses, conceived as 'sisters and daughters' of the Charans. Worship of these Goddesses did not need Brahmin intervention, and Brahmins played no major role in the Rajput chiefdoms at this early stage. I should stress that traditional Rajput ideology had no place for karmic ideology: the warrior passed, on his death at the battlefield, to Swarga, where he was comforted by beautiful Apsaras – ideas that in the best Dumézilian tradition (1952) recalls the Walhalla and its Valkyries. Sacrifice, central to Vedic tradition, was central, and the buffalo sacrifice was the rite that established and maintained chiefdom or state. But the role of Brahmin or Vedic priests in this sacrifice was quite minimal until a much later date.[10]

In the 16th century, things began to change. Jamnagar, in 1530, was the first port city founded by a Rajput chief, with the evident intention of attracting traders. The move soon proved its value in transforming the Rajput chiefdom to a full-fledged state, as the revenues from trade, financing a mercenary army, artillery, and the beginnings of a bureaucratic administration, gradually rendered the chief independent of the tribute and military support of his vassals. A century later, we see the development of the cult of the God-King Rama, the ideal ruler, which now becomes a standard item of the constitution of the state. The Rama cult, unlike that of the Goddess, calls for an establishment of Brahmins, who thus came to take on a new role in legitimating the rulers.

The following centuries see the emergence of the modern state in Saurashtra, with the minister as the real administrator of the state, with bureaucracies and armies, generally financed from trade and market production revenues, and with Brahmins in central administrative as well as priestly positions. The autocratic regime of the princes, however, gradually produced opposition from the merchant communities, who would finally become the main agents of the movement for Indian independence and the destruction of the princely states in the area. The first forty years of independence may be described as the period of hegemonic domination by this bourgeoisie descended from the old merchant communities, with Brahmins and the sanskritised Patidar peasants (some of whom had become part of the bourgeoisie) supporting the Congress as the ruling power.

This hegemony was not uncontested, however. There was an insurrection in support of the princes, led by a younger brother of the ruler of Bhavnagar, which had to be put down violently. It lasted about five years and was finally crushed by 1953 (Spodek 1976, Thorner 1956). The land reforms from 1954 on mainly benefited the Patidar peasants, while the Rajputs lost much land and their Koli clients, traditionally closely allied to and fighting for the rulers, largely failed to benefit from the reforms. The ruler-merchant opposition had become a conflict between the bourgeoisie and a number of rural communities traditionally allied to the Rajputs. When animal sacrifice was banned in Gujarat, in 1972, this was clearly a victory of the Vaishnavite, non-violent bourgeoisie over the rural Goddess worshippers, for whom such sacrifice was a central rite (Tambs-Lyche 1982).

This brief tour of Saurashtra's history shows two things. First, power constellations change fundamentally at least twice: from dominant merchant influence at Vallabhi to the 'feudal' order of the middle age, and then a gradual growth of the bourgeoisie from the 16th century onward to the post-independence period, making the merchants dominant again.

At the first age, Buddhism and Jainism may have been hegemonic in the towns – though the kings were 'Hindus' – but this hegemony cannot have extended to the 'tribal' countryside. In the medieval period, Rajput ideology and Goddess worship was certainly 'hegemonic' among the agricultural population, but this period also sees a healthy Jain literature which stands well outside the paradigm. Merchant communities, then, may have been controlled by Rajput power, but certainly did not accept Rajput hegemony. Very probably, the formerly Buddhist merchants turned Hindus in this period, but they became Vaishnavites, retaining the karmic ideology and stress of non-violence we know from Buddhism. They, too, retained an ideological autonomy in relation to the dominant warriors.

As the bourgeoisie gained power and influence from the 16th century onwards, this Vaishnavite ideology grew in importance (the Swaminarayana sect would, from the 19th century, convert a large number of peasants, especially Patidars, to a religion close to that of the merchants), and we end up in the second half of the 20th century with the near-hegemonic position of the bourgeoisie. But though this bourgeois dominance was clear enough in the seventies, as shown by the ban on animal sacrifice, it was clearly a case of coercion rather than persuasion, and the hegemony was notably weaker the farther one went into the countryside or the lower one descended in the caste order. There was, moreover, a return to 'tradition' – the heritage from the Rajput period – during the second half of the eighties, reducing the degree of bourgeois (and Congress party) dominance. Today, in this area, there is a sustained effort by the BJP government to reform lower-caste sanctuaries (Sheikh 2010) and impose a Vaishnavite-influenced 'Hindutva' on the lower orders. This may be seen as a direct continuation of bourgeois dominance in post-independence days. Gujarat may, indeed, be the one among Indian states where marginal Hinduism is under the strongest pressure from the hegemonic ideology backed by the authorities, but even here, there are pockets of resistance.

A discussion about the Goddess

In 'The Good Country' (2004) I dealt with contemporary society in Saurashtra. The work certainly taught me the dangers of assuming a single, dominant ideology as hegemonic in the region. To show what I mean by hegemony and resistance in an everyday context, I shall relate one evening's talk - in 1990 - about the Goddess in the guest house where I lodged in the peripheral town of Dhrangadhra.

'The Goddesses are all one and the same,' said our Brahmin host. 'There are just different names for the one Goddess. I know about these things, since I am a Brahmin.' Only the anthropologist was dumb enough to protest, in public, as it were. But as some of us went outside for a smoke, the low-caste Koli who worked in the trucking office behind the guest house came up to me. 'You are quite right, he said, there are many Goddesses, and they are all different. Our host is a Brahmin, he knows nothing about these things. I could tell you quite a bit about Bahucharaji, for she is the Goddess of my own community.' Simple as it is, this episode shows the relation between hegemonic and subaltern discourse: the first assimilates all difference under a central heading, the second asserts the autonomy of subaltern culture.

This example seems to me emblematic of what I have seen of the caste order in Saurashtra. A hegemonic discourse exists, and to some extent this is a Brahmanical discourse, merged with that of the dominant bourgeoisie. But at the same time, an alternative discourse, muted in public but eloquent in private, underlines the limited character of hegemony. What makes it possible to speak about hegemony, after all, is this code-shifting, common to a large number of people. There was the policeman who, in private, said 'how do you think I could dress like this if I was not corrupt?', the teacher who would talk indignantly in class about the dowry system yet wonder seriously in private how to pay for his own daughter's dowry, and so on. On each role, I concluded (2004), there are rules about what a person in this role (not necessarily related to caste) is supposed to say: it is a teacher's duty to support progress and talk against the dowry system, just as the policeman is supposed to fight corruption. These strictures on role performance correspond to an all-Indian, hegemonic discourse, clearly related to the ideology of the dominant bourgeoisie. But, then, everybody knows that these are ideological strictures which do not correspond to the exigencies of real life. 'Resistance,' as Scott (1985) calls it, is a necessary mode of survival. And, as the discussion about the Goddess or Goddesses shows, this duplicity extends to the cultural and religious domain.

Duplicity and resistance

To what extent, then, is this duplicity a specifically Indian phenomenon? I rather think it a general one, common to situations where the dominant can control public discourse and thus exercise a partial hegemony. Yet there is, I think, a particular Indian component here, and this is where Gupta's view (2000) comes in. Gupta stresses how every caste has its own ideology, rooted in caste identity, an identity which usually implies some pride in one's own community (see also Ghurye 1932: 3-4, Kolenda 1978: 11, Tambs-Lyche forthcoming). Scott (1985) stresses the importance, for resistance to function, of community, and I have argued above that this is a crucial element in working-class culture. It is the existence of community that provides for alternative arenas, shielded from the dominant discourse. This was how Blacks, in Dollard's Deep South (1937), were able to express their 'double personality' – and he stresses how blacks prefer to live separated from Whites, to preserve the relative autonomy of such arenas. Berreman stresses the same point with regard to Untouchables in his village, in the foothills of the Himalayas (1973). The talk I had with 'my' Koli trucking agent could not have taken place if our host had not been a good Brahmin, abstaining from tobacco.

My point is simply that caste provides a privileged arena for such intra-community communication, because each caste (or, sometimes, a cluster of similarly ranked castes) tend to live separately and guard their own separate arenas. [11] This fundamental requirement for resistance is thus practically universal in India. Indeed, this means that the 'public scenes' are restricted in importance, which implies two things: first, the space for exercising hegemony is restricted, and second, this makes it easier to live with the contradictions between what one is supposed to say in one scene and what one 'quite naturally' says in another. The 'double personality' typical of Dollard's blacks thus becomes general in the Indian context.

South Kanara – a pluricultural setting

Indeed, when my Brahmin host in Dhrangadhra boasts of his specifically

Brahmin understanding of religion, he is doing so in his own guest house, a setting where he is unquestionably the boss. The Gauda Saraswat Brahmins of South Kanara would have been reluctant to say such things in public. They would have been afraid of being accused of 'casteism.' To me, in private, they did not hide their pride in being Brahmins, but in public, their discourse was modulated in terms of the progressive, liberal bourgeoisie, with elements of Hindu nationalism. Though it was somehow understood, by these latter references, that Brahmins were the 'natural' leaders of the Hindu nation, it was always implied that this national community included all 'real' Hindus. The duplicity of discourse, here, was specifically one of caste: privately, the Gauda Saraswat Brahmins were extremely proud of their ancestry, but publicly, their dominance over commerce and urban society in South Kanara was expressed in terms of the bourgeoisie as a class. If they dominated the Chamber of Commerce, the Rotary and Lion Clubs, and controlled the important banks of the area, this was clearly and simply because they were the very core of the progressive bourgeoisie (Tambs-Lyche 2011).

But in South Kanara, even more than in Saurashtra, this apparent hegemony was distinctly partial. In the countryside, it was the Bunts – the old landholding caste – which were dominant (Surendra Rao 2010, Hegde 2015). In the towns, the most obvious rivals of the Gauda Saraswat Brahmins were the Catholics, of which the elite were converts from that Brahmin caste. Among the subaltern communities, both the Billava ex-toddy tappers and the Mogaveera fishermen had attained political and social importance. There was also quite a powerful Muslim minority. None of these groups accepted the hegemony of the GSB. Thus the GSB temples, dedicated to the God Venkatarama, were decidedly the richest and most prestigious cult places in the region, but they were strictly caste temples, and only very occasionally used by other castes. GSB banks, schools, colleges, hospitals and their 'deemed university' at Manipal certainly attracted clients or students from other castes, giving the GSB a definite predominance in the region, but this, quite definitely, did not constitute ideological hegemony. The common view, among other groups and even among the GSB themselves, was that they were 'immigrants' to South Kanara, often called 'Konkanis,' since they had come from Goa and spoke the Konkani language. Nobody imitated the GSB, in religion or in culture, and indeed, the schools and colleges of the GSB had been preceded by those of the Catholics and of the small, mostly Billava, Protestant community. Between the communities, there was competition rather than relations of dominance (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2010).

It would, indeed, be difficult to identify a hegemonic discourse in South Kanara. More than any other Indian region I know, and certainly far more than Saurashtra, this is a 'multi-cultural' community. Public discourse has, to some extent, been dominated by the GSB, at least in the towns, but not to the extent of silencing or muting the voice of other communities.

Resistance and hegemony in India

What my excursion into history seems to show, is neither a conglomeration of autonomous minorities represented by the different castes, nor a series of situations characterised by absolute hegemony by the ideology of one caste cluster over another. Rather, each stage shows what we might call imperfect domination, where hegemony extends to a part of the population generally supportive of those in power, while important sectors of the population stand apart. There is, then, for all the periods discussed, an attempt at hegemony by the dominant, but an attempt which butts against the resistance of parts of the people. These situations correspond to none of the four alternatives I set out above. They indicate, of course, an ongoing, historically unbroken quest for domination. They also indicate an equally constant resistance against it.

Such resistance will not surprise any reader of Scott, who seems to see resistance as the 'natural,' dialectical opposite to dominance. Even when coerced into sharing paradigms of the dominant discourse, subalterns (not Scott's term, but apt here, I think) will find ways of asserting their difference. Scott does not cite Dollard's classical work (1937) on 'Caste and Class in a Southern Town,' from the Deep South, but he might have done. Dollard, whose initial interest was in the 'psychology of blacks' notes how their public discourse – with whites present – show all the required signs of submission, while their talk among themselves – and, he notes with some pride – at times with the white researcher, shows very different attitudes. Clearly, this is an example of hegemony *and* resistance, acting simultaneously and through the same actors.

Neither the Brahminical view of caste nor the 'modern' bourgeois ideology have succeeded in overcoming the resistance that, in my view, is intrinsic to the communitarian character of the caste order. This is because the communities – subaltern as well as dominant – dispose of a double set of arenas for communication, intra- and inter-caste, which serves to limit the influence of any discourse pretending to hegemony.

And yet, in 'The Good Country' (2004), I noted a marked tendency for social encounters, in India, to express rank difference. [12] 'The definition of the situation,' as Thomas (1923) conceptualised it, in India seems to require that the parties sort out their relative rank for communication to proceed. It is, indeed, as if 'hierarchising discourse' is hegemonic: nobody can escape assigned rank to establish the kind of egalitarian ideal we (according to the pundits) cherish in the West. Rank, with obvious implications for caste status, does seem to play a considerable part in Indian social life. Yet, as I have noted elsewhere (2004, 2015, 2017), the rank established in any encounter does not necessarily extend beyond the situation as defined: such rank is clearly important, but it does not necessarily last. Rank is important in India then. But to what extent does it imply a hegemonic rank order, one which must be respected and complied with in all situations?

India has long been a stratified society. But as my swift tour through history has shown, this is not a constant, unchanging situation. One way to interpret the GSB's acceptance of their 'immigrant' status, is to insist on a certain dynamic: the GSB see themselves, to some extent, as the vanguard of Brahminical civilization in a land, South Kanara, where the countryside is dominated by a non-brahminical, local variant of Hinduism called the *bhuta* cults. Brahmins, in this perspective, stand as a 'mission of the interior' whose function is to 'Hinduise' or 'Brahminise' India.

We see something of the same attitude with my Brahmin host in Dhrangadhra. His Brahmin, 'pan-Indian' views on the Goddess oppose the remains of the Goddess cults that sustained Rajput dominance in the 'feudal' period of Saurashtra's history – what locals still referred to as 'traditional society.' I have noted how Susan Baily sees an increase in Brahmin influence from the 18th century onwards, and Dirks from the 19th century. The process, however, is much older than that: from around 800 A.D., the Tamil kingdoms of the South 'imported' large number of Brahmins and settled them in Brahmadeya – gifts-to-Brahmins – villages, clearly to underpin a new type of royalty founded on enormous temples (mainly to Shiva), situated in the royal capitals (Sastri 1975, Stein 1994). Thus the efforts at Hinduising or Brahminising India have a long history, and we have seen how the Manusmrti ('laws of Manu') seems to represent a crucial point early in this process. My argument here is that this Brahminical 'mission to the interior' – working through what Srinivas called 'sanskritisation' (1952, 1962, 1967) as well as, today, through the various avatars of 'Hindutva' associated with the Hindu right – has never been completed: it is still an ongoing process. The quest for Brahmin hegemony with its particular interpretations of caste society, is still going on.

Similarly, what Srinivas used to call 'Westernisation' has been of importance in modern India. When Srinivas wrote, in the fifties and sixties, he opposed this process to sanskritisation: I would hold, that as the Indian bourgeoisie has become more sanskritised, these two movements have tended to melt into one. In spite of the opposition between 'secularism' and Hindutva in present-day India, the influence of a bourgeoisie that is at once Hindu – influenced by 'brahmanical' ideas - and 'modern,' continues to increase. Yet here again, we butt against the resistance built into the caste system, as the movement of the OBC – other backward castes, in practice the class of well-off agriculturalists - oppose their sometimes 'traditional' values to those of the bourgeoisie. The quest for bourgeois dominance, let alone hegemony, still has a long way to go in India.

If Marx was right, that bourgeois thinking, the paradigm of capital, would engulf and annihilate communitarian consciousness, then the process certainly lasted about a hundred years beyond Marx's own death in the West. Certainly, the kind of working-class culture and community described in the 1950s and 1960s has declined sharply since then. But does that mean that there are no arenas left for alternative discourse? Is the liberalist, bourgeois hegemony absolute in the West today? I shall leave the reader to consider the answer.

I conclude, like Tönnies (1932), that community is a constant in human history so far, and that it is the resilience of subaltern communities that tends to make absolute hegemony impossible in any known social order. But in this context, India has a privileged position, since such communities are more systematically present than elsewhere. This is the specificity of the caste order.

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Notes

[1] This, indeed, was how my own work on India started, with a study of the Patidars of London (1980).

[2] Among the best known are Risley 1891, Thurston and Rangachari 1909, Enthoven 1920-22.

[3] I do not necessarily imply that they are less common now, but prefer to stay here with my own observations.

[4] An example of this might be when a labour union accepts a lay-off or even a reduction in wages to preserve the 'competitiveness' of the enterprise. 'Competition' would represent, here, the paradigm that, in this particular case, is not transcended, indicating the hegemonic status of a market-oriented ideology.

[5] Note that Tönnies (1932) refused this kind of opposition between 'modern' and 'traditional' community formations: for him, community

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(Gemeinschaft) is continuously present throughout history as the expression of Man's fundamentally social nature, while 'association' (Gesellschaft) only appears in the later stages of historical development.

[6] The subjects 'imagine that they are subjects because he is a king,' says Marx (Capital, 1: 57, n.1).

[7] Among other writers who have inspired my criticism of Chakrabarty here, I may cite Hobsbawm (1964) and the Norwegian historian Edvard Bull (1947).

[8] This would seem to be how the remaining examples of working-class struggles are seen by proponents of the hegemonic liberalist order in the West.

[9] The date varies with different scholars. Klostermaier puts it between 200 B.C. and 100 A.D (1994: 483). Embree (1988: 214) at the Shunga period, 2nd to 1st century, B.C. Yadava (2002: 82) between 200 B.C. and 200 A.D. Kulke and Rothermund (1986: 85) opt for the 2nd or 3rd century A.D., later than most scholars.

[10] I have dealt with the buffalo sacrifice in Saurashtra and Rajasthan elsewhere (1991, 1996, 1997, 2004). For a discussion of buffalo sacrifice in Bengal, see Nicholas, 2012.

[11] It may be well to remember that, while untouchables in Tamil Nadu were banned from entering the Agrahara – the Brahmin street – Brahmins were not allowed into their street either (Ghurye 1932, Béteille 1965).

[12] There is, of course, nothing original in this. Among others who stress this tendency, I should cite Parry (1979).

ARTICLE

FROM REBELLION TO LITIGATION: CHOTANAGPUR TENANCY ACT (1908) AND THE HOS OF KOLHAN GOVERNMENT ESTATE

BY SANJUKTA DAS GUPTA

Abstract: Tribal protest and resistance in colonial India have usually been depicted as rebellions, violent upsurges and 'savage attacks' against the state. However, since the late nineteenth century 'tribal' communities had also taken recourse to legal battles in the law courts in order to establish their rights – which, in fact, has been far less discussed by scholars. Resistance and rebellion are both forms of identity assertion, and I argue that these interventions have to be understood and analyzed on the basis of the specific histories of individual communities. In course of the rent settlement of 1914-18 which took place following the enactment of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) of 1908, Ho tenants of the Kolhan Government Estate set out to establish their *khuntkatti* status through legal claims in the settlement court at Chaibasa. By making *khuntkatti* tenures secure against encroachments by landlords, the British colonial government intended the CNTA to be a measure of protection for the Adivasis of Chotanagpur. However, in practice it had very different implications in Kolhan, as land rights and the social hierarchy there had developed on significantly diverse trajectories from the rest of Chotanagpur ever since the British annexation of the estate in 1837. This article traces how the Hos reinterpreted their past and proposed a new blueprint for their future in the context of this Act. It therefore draws attention to the agency of the Hos who negotiated actively and with considerable adroitness with the colonial administration from their position of subalternity. In doing so, they reshaped tradition and redefined the parameters of community identity.

Tribal or Adivasi[1] protests and resistance movements in colonial India have long been depicted as rebellions, violent upsurges and 'savage attacks' against the state, whether colonial or indigenous. Focusing on the destabilization of tribal societies as a result of the colonial encounter, historians have interpreted the resultant tribal revolts as 'a crude form of protest' (Jha 1964: 1), as part of the freedom struggle (Datta 1957; Roy Choudhury 1959; Baske 1976; Singh 1985), as religious revitalization and millenarian movements in which 'rebellious prophets' promised the return of a golden age (Fuchs 1965), as class struggles (Mohapatra 1991: 2), and as autonomous subaltern protests (Arnold 1982; Das Gupta 1985; Sarkar 1985; Hardiman 1994). The linkage between tribal rebellions and the wider national movement against colonialism was also debated. K.S. Singh (1985: 157-58), for instance, took 1920 to be the great watershed between rebellions which were 'sporadic, isolated and spontaneous,' and a new phase of tribal politics marked by 'movements which could be sustained only by organization and through external stimuli,' while Subalternist scholars emphasized the cultural and political autonomy of Adivasi movements *vis-à-vis* the statist politics and the project of the nationalist elites. Despite differences in their theoretical framework, such studies, on the one hand, tend to confirm and perpetuate the notion of an undifferentiated tribal population requiring protection against exploitative outsiders, which largely resembles stereotypical colonial depictions of tribal society. Some recent studies, on the other hand, have highlighted the fractures and cleavages and the reordering of the hierarchies within indigenous communities as a consequence of British rule (Dasgupta 1999; Das Gupta 2011).

Significantly, in many of these writings the tribal rebel comes across primarily as a premodern figure attempting to make sense of the changes unleashed by the forces of colonial modernity. Bates and Shah (2014: 2) have pointed out that even in the discourses of contemporary indigenous resistance Adivasis are represented as the 'primitive other.' Indeed, the image of the primitive savage prone to violent resistance remains embedded within 'mainstream' thinking in India. Questioning whether there was anything intrinsically 'Adivasi' about violent resistance, since peasant societies have time and again resorted to similar means of protest, Bates and Shah (2014: 2-5) have underlined the need for a historically-situated approach to understand Adivasi resistance. They have pointed out the huge variety in the forms of mobilization encompassing both violent and non-violent agitations. Nevertheless, the dominant imagery of tribal protest has remained one of violent resistance. As Saliha Belmessous (2011: 13) reminds us, although violence did form an important part of indigenous resistance, it was also used in support of legal claims over rights. However, protest and resistance need not necessarily be violent, but could be registered through non-violent means as well. This would include the everyday forms of resistance through a silent disregard of existing laws (Scott 1985). Far less discussed are the various legal forms of resistance and the legal battles in which tribal peasants had participated since the late nineteenth century as subjects of the Raj.

Furthermore, the tribal peasantry have almost always been depicted as victims of the new colonial legal framework, unaccustomed to its protocols and duped of their land rights by swindling non-Adivasi lawyers (Baske 1976; MacDougall 1985) and, at times, resorting to violent rebellion as their only means of self-assertion. Without belying the truth of such incidents, it is important to consider another aspect of the Adivasis' encounters with British law, i.e., the consistent and continuative filing of petitions and negotiations in their bid to establish statutory recognition of existing rights. This aspect clearly emerges, for instance, in Gunnel Cederlöf's (2008: 230-31) analysis of the Todas of the Nilgiri hills, who had expressed their resistance to colonial land appropriations by attempting to establish their legal claims over their lands, utilizing the discourse of the dominant colonial authority. This was by no means an isolated case, as other communities did the same at other points of time and space. The Hos of Kolhan Government Estate in Singhbhum district of Chotanagpur, as I will show, similarly registered their protest to homogenizing laws which eroded their land rights, and attempted to secure their legal entitlements by seeking recourse in colonial law in the wake of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) of 1908.

Although the CNTA was broadly intended as a measure to protect the Adivasis of the entire region of Chotanagpur by making *khuntkatti* (i.e. original reclaimers) tenures secure against encroachments by landlords, it had very unique implications in Kolhan, where land rights and social hierarchy had developed on significantly diverse trajectories from the rest of Chotanagpur, following the British annexation of the estate in 1837. The deluge of *khuntkatti* claims filed in the Settlement Court at Chaibasa between 1913-14 in the course of the resettlement operations in Kolhan, together with the village assemblies convened with the specific purpose of discussing the matter, could justly be described as a community's attempt to carve out a specific status and identity within the framework of colonial law, even though this resistance was based upon kinship groups and local, village-based solidarities, and did not refer to the entire, undifferentiated Ho community acting in unison. In this movement therefore, we see the Ho tenantry claiming their rights as modern colonial subjects rather than as 'wild' and 'primitive' rebels. This argument also prompts an analysis of the manifold ways in which Hos reinterpreted their past, invoked memories, and proposed a new blueprint for their future in the context of this Act. As the Hos negotiated actively and with considerable adroitness – albeit with varying degrees of success – with the colonial administration from their position of subalternity, they reflected on and 're-presented' their own identity and history in a creative confrontation between cultural values and political change. Our understanding of tribal societies would perhaps benefit considerably from an approach where the varying modes of tribal responses, both violent and non-violent, to colonial intervention are analyzed on the basis of the specific histories of individual communities.

The backdrop: Colonial intrusion and the formation of the Kolhan Government Estate

Within the colonial archives, records relating to 'tribes' tend to proliferate at certain moments of disjunction, i.e., during times of insurgency. Initially the tribal world had figured in official perceptions as the backdrop for the counter-insurgency measures of the colonial state. Largely because of this association the image of the Adivasi as an anti-modern rebel continued to inform the contemporary world. The disruptions of the Maratha and British incursions had resulted in political turmoil and uncertainty in the greater part of Chotanagpur, including Singhbhum, during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In this situation the Hos, or Larka Kols (warrior Kols) as they were then known, frequently rebelled against the indigenous rulers of the region. Not only did they attempt to repudiate their ever-increasing obligations to the ruling classes but, goaded by economic insecurity, they raided the neighbouring settled peasant tracts. In the early nineteenth century the Singhbhum rulers sought British assistance in quelling the Hos whom they described as their subjects in rebellion. Aiming to build up a system of loose control over the region with the help of this group of local collaborators, the British recognised the local feudatory chiefs as lawful rulers and the tribal population as their subjects. At this initial point of contact, British understanding of the Hos was largely influenced by the prevailing notions that existed among the local Hinduized ruling groups. The Ramgarh Magistrate thus described the Hos as 'dreadful pests to the civilized part of Singboom' and as 'the lowest kind of Hindoos' who, in their manners and customs, were 'little removed from savages.[2]' The Hos were characterized as a fiercely exclusive community who would not permit the entry of any outsiders into their territory. Commenting on their famed propensity for exclusiveness, Major Roughsedge, who led the British forces into Singhbhum in 1821, wrote, 'A traveller would as soon think of venturing into a tiger's den as of traversing any point of Larka Cole.[3]'

Despite British assistance, strife and unrest remained endemic in Singhbhum in the 1820s and '30s, and finally the Company's government came to question the utility of a political alliance with the discredited chiefs of the region who could barely keep their overmighty subjects in check. Enquiries into the recurring rebellions, particularly the Kol uprising of 1831-32, had also led to a new conviction of the distinctiveness of these regions, which had made them particularly vulnerable to powerful adversaries. In the changed circumstances, Hos came to be regarded not as predatory raiders and savages prone to violence, but rather as a community wronged by non-tribals. Henceforth the British claimed for themselves the role of 'liberators' of the Hos from the 'oppressions and exploitation' of the indigenous rulers. In order to pursue these objectives, the Kolhan Government Estate, composed of the Ho-dominated areas of Singhbhum, was established in 1837 and placed under the direct administration of the Company's government. The formerly 'savage' Larka Kols were thus elevated to the status of 'noble savage,' who had lived a life of Arcadian simplicity, and who were to be 'civilized' into useful subjects of the Raj under the 'benevolent' rule of paternalist British officers who were to protect them not only against rapacious outsiders, but also from their own 'self-destructive' customs.[4]

This was to be achieved through the introduction of British education, and through retaining the *manki-munda* system, i.e., governance through the village headman, the *munda*, and the *manki*, the head of a *pir*. [5] The communal structure of the village was apparently preserved. However, by incorporating the village leadership within the framework of British administration, colonial rule redefined their roles and their relationships with the rest of the community. Nonetheless, bringing together the Hos of different regions within the Kolhan Government Estate weeded out their divergent political loyalties by placing them under one political banner. More importantly, retaining the *manki-munda* system did legitimize and indigenize British rule in the eyes of the people (Das Gupta 2011). Following British annexation, violent uprisings of the Hos occurred in 1857, when a section loyal to Arjun Singh, the former raja of Singbhum, followed him in rebellion against the British. After the suppression of the rebellion, Arjun Singh's estate was confiscated in 1858 and its administration made over to the Board of Revenue in 1859. Significantly, after 1857, there were no more reports of large-scale militancy among the Hos. This may be contrasted with the experience of other Adivasi communities of the region (for instance, the Mundas and the Oraons) where violent uprisings, often rooted in agrarian grievances, persisted into the twentieth century. Much of such agrarian, and later forest-related grievances existed among the Hos as well, but rather than open rebellion, protest was organized on other, less violent lines.

Land relations in Kolhan

Once the Kolhan Government Estate was formed, steps were taken to bring the Hos of the estate under a formal tax structure as tenants of the British government. By the eighteenth century, despite dependence on forests and various forms of shifting cultivation, the socio-economic organization of the Hos as also those of the predominant Adivasi groups in Chotanagpur, such as Oraons, Santals and Mundas, had come to revolve around the primacy of settled cultivation based on the use of ploughs. The village and the control over its resources thus constituted the central determinants of Adivasi life. Some historians, such as Kishwar (1987: 199) have argued that land ownership among the Hos was communal in nature. Communal control did not, however, indicate 'communal ownership of land.' In fact, the unit of agricultural organization was the individual family, which owned within certain well-recognised limits the holding it operated. The original clearers of jungle who set up the village and their descendants, variously known among the Hos as the *marang killi* (the principal clan) or the *dupup parja* (original settlers) as well as *khuntkattidar*, formed the dominant group, and claimed special privileges within the village.

Generally speaking, the original reclaimers, as the most important element in the village system, enjoyed special rights, which were interwoven with the religious observances and customs of the people. Ho custom decreed that the village founding families had an inalienable claim to the fields that they reclaimed and to ensure this, a strict practice of primogeniture in the male line was practised, which excluded daughters and descendants on the wife's side of the family from inheritance. The superior status of the original settling group in the village was institutionalized by reserving for itself the key posts of the *munda* and the *manki*, who, in fact, represented the Hos in their dealings with the regional rulers. In this way the men of the founding families retained their dominance in socio-economic and political matters.

Unlike the Mundas of Chotanagpur, Hos were, however, not the original reclaimers of jungle everywhere in Kolhan. Although northern Kolhan had been almost entirely jungle when it was reclaimed by the Hos, and unbroken *khuntkatti* lineages could be traced in this region, the south had already been settled by Gonds and Bhuiyas, who were subsequently driven out and replaced by groups of advancing Hos (Tuckey 1920: 18). These villages in south Kolhan, strictly speaking, did not have a significant number of Ho original clearers and the distinction between original and later settlers was less pronounced.

It is important to keep these differences in mind when historically situating tribal communities. Among the Mundas and the Oraons there was a real distinction between the *khuntkattidars* and the later settlers or *parjas* so far as their relationship with the overlord was concerned (Roy 434). The *khuntkattidars* paid the village rent to the local rulers at a privileged rate, while the *parjas* paid rent at a higher rate for lands allotted to them. It is difficult to ascertain whether such a system also prevailed among the Hos. With the strengthening of the state system in Singhbhum in the seventeenth century, some form of tribute had come to be exacted by the petty rulers from the Hos, who were claimed as their subjects. It would not be inappropriate, therefore, to suggest that the core group was taxed at preferential rates, as was the custom throughout Chotanagpur. Since the eighteenth century, however, Hos constantly challenged the claim to superior authority of the overlords and practically shook off all forms of tribute obligations in many places so that British records of the early nineteenth century did not note any forms of differential tributes among the Hos. Even if privileged rent rates had existed for *khuntkattidars*, it would appear that the practice was more prevalent to north Kolhan, which had been cleared for cultivation by the Hos themselves.

Following the British annexation in 1837, Hos of Kolhan Government Estate were all recognised as tenants of the government and a uniform rate of rent was fixed for the *entire* community without making any distinctions between original clearers and later settlers. By the end of the nineteenth century, the tradition of rental differentiation, if it had ever existed, had been nearly obliterated. The situation in Kolhan differed from other parts of Chotanagpur in two other ways. In the first place, unlike northern Chotanagpur and the Santal Parganas there was no intermediary class of *zamindars* or landlords in Kolhan Government Estate which was directly under the control of the government. Secondly, Ho raiyats enjoyed yet another advantage in that there was no non-cultivating superior class of raiyats as was common elsewhere and they were all recognised as tenants of the government.

Agrarian discontent and the search for traditions

The second half of the nineteenth century was a period of intense agrarian agitation against impositions of moneylenders, zamindari control, illegal rent increases and imposition of forced labour (*begari*) throughout Chotanagpur and the Santal Parganas. These included the Santal *hul* of 1855, the prolonged Kherwar movement and Sardari *larai* (1858 to the 1890s) and Birsa Munda's *ulgulan*[6] of 1890s. During this period the government conducted various experiments in tenancy legislations and in formulating 'fair' rents, an early example of which was the Chotanagpur Tenures Act of 1869 which partially recognized the privileged claims of the original settlers, the *bhuinhars.*[7] These did not, however, resolve the agrarian problem and the tenancy question remained contentious. Following Birsa Munda's *ulgulan* in 1899-1900, the government again attempted to address the grievances of the Adivasis through legislation. The outcome was the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act (CNTA) of 1908 which had major implications for the Munda people of Chotanagpur, but later for the Hos in Kolhan as well.

Intending to provide a degree of protection to the Chotanagpur Adivasis, the CNTA attempted to make *khuntkatti* tenures secure against the encroachment of landlords, by fixing their rents in perpetuity and making the sale of these lands illegal for any purpose other than arrears of rent. It also gave statutory recognition to existing custom regarding use of forest, occupancy rights, rights to reclaim land etc. Protection of custom, in this case, appeared to reflect the imperial notion of government as 'protector' of categorized subjects, particularly the 'primitive' tribes. The Act fell short of expectations, as it came too late for the majority of the Mundas, since only 156

Munda villages could trace intact *khuntkatti* roots, and registration of ancestral property occurred in only 405 out of 3614 square miles of cultivated land (Hoffmann and van Emelen 1990 [1933]: 2402). The Jesuit missionary Rev. Hoffman who, as Tete notes, had drafted the special laws on Mundari *khuntkatti* that appeared in Appendix 1 of the CNTA (Tete 1984), asserted that this did not, however, 'diminish the intrinsic value and significance of the official recognition' of the Munda land system in the areas where it has survived. The benefits of the CNTA, moreover, were not limited to the Mundas. 'They extended to absolutely all raiyats of Chotanagpur, and they were so enormous that nobody, who had not lived long among the Aborigines in the gloomy pre-settlement times, can appreciate them rightly' (Hoffmann and van Emelen 1990 [1933]: 2402). Similarly, contemporary historians have generally conceded that despite its limitations, the CNTA was indeed a recognition of the political importance of the tribal tenants (Mohapatra 1991: 38) and marked a watershed in the history of the colonial state intervention in land relations in Chotanagpur (Singh 1972: 375).

By actively seeking to identify traditional practice and custom, the CNTA, as Carol Upadhyay (2009: 34-36) has shown, served to objectify the 'traditional' Munda social system. She argues that the provisions regarding 'tribal custom and usages' in fact largely drew upon the model of tribal social organisation developed by colonial administrators and missionaries, especially Father Hoffmann, during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This search for 'tradition' was widespread not only in Chotanagpur, but also in Singhbhum, which included both the Kolhan Government Estate and the districts in the control of indigenous chiefs.[8] The *Final Report on the Settlement of Kolhan Government Estate of 1897,* prepared by J.A. Craven, reported upon the nature of *khuntkatti* rights in the villages in Kolhan. A more detailed enquiry was undertaken by T.S. Macpherson in the early years of the twentieth century while preparing a Record of Rights for Porahat Estate in Singhbhum. These investigations attempted to trace the genesis of 'Mundari *khuntkatti'* holdings and laid down their specific attributes and rights together with that of the non-Mundari tenures. The colonial state's endeavour thus came to reify custom into a 'vastly simplified and uniform property regime' (Scott 1998: 34-35).

By uniformly codifying and legalising existing rights, the Act had failed to take into account the historical evolution of these rights. This becomes evident when it was sought to be applied throughout Chotanagpur, even in Singhbhum district where, as noted above, local customs differed significantly. Local specificities and the unique features of Kolhan were not considered when the CNTA was discussed and no special provisions or exceptions were made in its favour. The CNTA thus had very different implications for the Ho people of Kolhan Government Estate, whose social structure and system of governance differed considerably from the other Adivasi groups of Chotanagpur. For instance, every resident cultivator had the right to extend his cultivation by reclaiming a portion of the wasteland within his village with the permission of his headman. There were no intermediate tenures between government as proprietor and the actual cultivators of the soil, the *mankis* and *mundas* themselves being, so far as their holdings were concerned, on the same footing as the other raiyats. In fact, it was feared that there were many villages where the headman did not belong to the family of the original founders and would have to pay a higher rent than those of his raiyats identified as *khuntkattidars* if the CNTA became operative.

The provisions of the Act were at first largely ignored in Kolhan when it came into force in Chotanagpur. However, the resettlement operations in Kolhan during 1913-1918 brought the problem of contradictory rights and claims into focus. The implications of the CNTA for Kolhan came up for discussion in 1912, in the context of the proposals for the resettlement of the estate. The issue developed into an intense debate between the district officers and the Government of Bihar and Orissa in which traditions were invoked and reinterpreted by officialdom. The local officers with previous experience of the district opposed the introduction of the CNTA in Kolhan, which they felt ran counter to the specificities of the region. The Commissioner of Chotanagpur, together with the Director of Land Records and the Deputy Commissioner, proposed that Kolhan should be excluded from the operation of the Chotanagpur Tenancy Act, and that a short and simple regulation should be adopted for its administration. The Government of Bihar and Orissa, on the other hand, favoured the formulation of a uniform system and the creation of broad, homogeneous categories throughout Chotanagpur. Moreover, the government decreed that the resettlement had to be carried out under the CNTA. The Secretary to the Government of Bihar and Orissa argued that there was little doubt that *khuntkatti* rights existed in Kolhan, 'although the people may have been too ignorant to assert them and Government cannot ignore these rights merely because they may lose some revenue by doing so' (Tuckey 1920: 92).

Since Hos formed the overwhelming majority of the population in Kolhan, the general impression shared by the colonial administrators was that they were the original inhabitants of the Kolhan and that practically all the land under cultivation had been reclaimed by them. British officers therefore had expected to find cultivators with *khuntkatti* rights in every village. However, as discussed earlier, in many villages, particularly in the southern part of the estate, the original reclaimers of the soil were not the Hos but others like the Buiyas whom they had driven out. Since the CNTA, following the customs prevalent among the Mundas of Ranchi, restricted *khuntkatti* rights to the descendants of the original founders, all claims to *khuntkatti* in such villages were disallowed. Even where the family of the founders lived in the village, it was not easy to ascertain their descendants after so many years of British rule. A survey of seventy-four villages of different *pirs* in the estate revealed that only about six per cent of the tenants of these villages could claim *khuntkatti* status, although they held twenty per cent of the area. In six of the seventy-four villages there were no *khuntkattidars*, in fifty-seven villages the headmen were *khuntkattidars* and in eleven villages the *khuntkattidars* did not include headmen.[9]

Moreover, raiyats possessing such rights were discovered in only 556 out of 913 villages. In twenty-three villages the *khuntkattidars* were not Hos but were of other communities, chiefly Bhumij and *goala* (Tuckey 1920: 4). The Deputy Commissioner feared that the differentiation between the *khuntkattidars* and non-*khuntkattidars* would have the immediate effect of stirring up disaffection and making the settlement proceedings unpopular[10], as the practice of imposing a uniform rent upon all classes of Hos ever since the annexation of Kolhan in 1837 had obliterated any memories of rental differences as far as the Hos were concerned.

The movement for *khuntkatti* status

The official debates over CNTA as the basis for the new settlement naturally had a massive impact upon the Ho tenants who sought to establish their claims over land through legal means. There was a widespread repudiation of the proposal to establish differential rent rates for original and later settlers in Ho villages. During the attestation operations in the course of the resettlement of 1913-18, ordinary Ho tenants, together with their community leaders, disputed the official interpretations of custom and attempted to establish their perceptions of community identity. We can identify two levels of this process: first there were the public discussions and conferences held in Kolhan to determine the nature of land rights among the Hos. This was followed by a mass legal movement to claim *khuntkatti* status through filing of petitions in the attestation courts.

In the initial stage, meetings were organized with the *mankis* of several *pirs,* where the significance of *khuntkatti* rights was discussed. The proceedings of a conference organized at the district headquarters in Chaibasa by the settlement office with the leading *mankis* and *mundas* on 8-9 July 1914 reveal that the term *khunkatti* was not in common use among the Hos. Some of the Ho leaders categorically stated that, 'We did not know that word [i.e. *khuntkatti*] before, and that 'those who first came to the village' were the *dupup parja* and that the later settlers came as servants.[11] The preferred term however was the '*marang killi.'* Some *mankis* defined the *marang killi* as the clan that first cleared the forest and stated that other *killis* settled in the village later. Others like Garbett Manki claimed that a village was not always cleared by one *marang killi*, but that this was often done by two or three *killis* together in which case they were all known as the *marang killi*.[12] There was universal agreement, however, on the cultural significance of the *marang killi*: it was the one from whom all would accept cooked food.

On the issue of preferential rent rates, it became increasingly clear that the majority of the village leadership discounted the existence of differences within the community and argued for the same rate for all Ho tenants. Brajmohon Manki, for instance, asserted that the rates of all the *killis* who had made their own lands should be the same as they had all taken equal trouble doing so. The original *killi* should not be given any preference.[13] Some also put forward the practical problems associated with granting privileges to a few. Mahendra Manki of Chiru *pir* pointed out that in his village there were twelve *killis* of whom only one was the *marang killi*. If *khuntkatti* status were granted only to the *marang killi*, he argued, they would be the only ones whose rents would not be enhanced and this would not be liked by the other *killis* who would have to pay at higher rates.

Many of the village leaders had formed the impression that *khuntkatti* meant that no raiyat would have his present rent enhanced for any land that he had cleared from the jungle. The statements of the *mankis* reveal their misconceptions and the various constructions of the term. For instance, Brajamohan Manki stated that he had understood *khuntkatti* to mean that the clearer of the land would become individual right-holder over the property. He also stated that, 'What I want is that all rice land recorded at the last settlement should not be enhanced.[14]' Garbett Manki summed up the general mood of the Ho leadership on this issue by saying that, 'Now that *khuntkatti* has been explained I do not want that one *killi* who had first settled in the villages should continue at fixed rates and the rents of the other *killis* who came to the village should be advanced. No one likes their rents to be increased, but if it is increased we want all the Hos to be treated the same.[15]' In fact, the overwhelming majority of the *mankis* and *mundas* argued that *khuntkatti* meant clearing of jungles for cultivation and thus all those who reclaimed jungles, whether the descendants of original founding families or not, should be assessed at the same rate.

Some of the more influential *mankis* put forth this claim in a memorial to the Lieutenant Governor of Bengal. Discounting the previous existence of any superior political authority over the Hos, they argued that prior to the annexation of the Kolhan by the British Government in 1837, the *mankis* had been the 'lords of their respective *pirs*' and did not have to pay tribute to anyone. Under British rule they had been transformed into servants of the government and remunerated with fees fixed at certain rates. Thus their right to hold property from generation to generation had become dependent on the orders of the government and their ancestral freeholds had been transformed to service tenures under British rule. These *mankis*, therefore, presented a memorial stating that, 'the majority of the aboriginal tribes living in the *pargana* are Mundari *khuntkatti* tenureholders or *raiyats* but unfortunately they are never treated as such.[16]' In other words, Hos, being Mundari *khuntkattidars* were all entitled to rents at privileged rates. There were more than 5,000 signatories to the memorial (Tuckey 1920: 93).

Some of the lower level officers of the district administration, who were themselves Adivasis and therefore were believed to have a greater knowledge of their customs, also reiterated the arguments submitted by the village leadership. The Assistant Settlement Officer, D.M. Panna, argued that *khuntkatti* rights were quite unknown among the Hos and the recording of such rights would tend to create an artificial and invidious distinction among them, which could lead to the disintegration of the solidarity of the communal system of Ho government. According to Panna, Hos '…believe that all the ancestors of different *killis* came to settle in the Kolhan at the same time. Every Ho may claim that his ancestor was among the original settlers of the community though not of a particular village and that every member of the Ho community had equal right of migration from village to village within the Kolhan and the right of reclamation of new lands.[17]' Thus, he argued that as a result of the CNTA the *khuntkatti* raiyats, would be looked upon as a favoured section of the community and within the villages where they would form a minority. Where the *munda* was a non-*khuntkatti* Ho, he would become an object of envy and even hatred.

There were of course dissenters who spoke in favour of according *khuntkatti* rights to the privileged *killis*. Most of them were the more affluent among the village leadership who would personally benefit as a result. Their position was voiced, for instance, by one Mahati Manki of Gumra *pir* on the second day of the conference.[18] Together with this, there were isolated suggestions that Hos who had never cleared forests but had bought lands from others could be, if necessary, assessed at higher rates.

While the village leaders debated the nature and meanings of *khuntkatti*, the Ho raiyats embarked upon the second phase of the movement and took the practical step of legally protecting their interests by putting forward claims to *khuntkatti* status. During the initial years of the settlement operations there was a spate of claims and counter claims where almost entire villages demanded recognition as *khuntkattidars*. In 1913-14, in the course of the enquiry into *khuntkatti* rights, a total number of 4,434 objections relating to *khuntkatti* were lodged in the settlement courts. Of these 2,848 were heard by D.M. Panna, of which 1,284 were allowed wholly or partly, and 1,564 were disallowed (Tuckey 1920: 33). In the second phase of attestation between 1916 and 1917 there were fewer cases relating to *khuntkatti*, possibly due to the implementation of a more rigorous process of identification. However, in 36 villages *khuntkatti* rights granted by the attestation officer were deemed to have been based on a misunderstanding of the law and granted too loosely. These cases went up for revision and the decisions were upheld in 8 cases, modified in one and revised in 27 cases (Tuckey 1920: 33).

The evidence in the case files of the attestation courts show that in claiming *khuntkatti* status, the objectors showed considerable skill in negotiating with the government, although their claims were in many cases overruled. In order to ascertain the historical evolution of *khuntkatti* rights, the attestation court drew up elaborate genealogical trees of entire *pirs*. But this often failed to clarify the matter. Settlement officers complained that genealogical trees were at times fabricated to buttress claims to *khuntkatti* at the attestation courts. In Baiku village of Chainpur *pir*, for instance, eight objectors stated that they were the descendants of the original founder Sado Ho and that they had not been recorded as *khuntkattidar* at attestation since they were absent when the genealogical tree was being prepared. The Case Officer dismissed the genealogical tree prepared by the tahsildar as ‘a tissue of imagination and concoction for the names of ancestors three or four generations back.[19]’ On cross-examination, the claimants did not mention Sado Ho as the founder, nor did they include themselves in the founding of the village and the Settlement Officer concluded that, ‘the genealogical tree filed by them has evidently been fabricated to help this claim,’ and the claim was disallowed.

Yet the settlement courts allowed several other claims. In Bagasereng, a village in the Ajodhya *pir*, where the Attestation Court had granted *khuntkatti* status only to the Jonko *killi*, members of the Honhaga and Hemrom *killi* also claimed *khuntkatti* status by arguing that their ancestors had settled in the village and reclaimed forests along with the members of the Jonko *killi,* and that the office of the *deuri* or priest was held by a member of their *killi*. When the *munda* (who belonged to the Jonko *killi*) was summoned, he asserted that the Jonkos, Hemroms and Honhagas had all come together and lived on equal terms. In the end, the Case Officer accepted their claims stating that, 'Each of these three *killis* is as long standing in the village as the other and when the members of the *munda* and *deuri killis* admit that the Hemroms are also *khuntkattidars* I do not see how I can refuse to record them as such.[20]'

In another case in Loharda village, Ho objectors claimed *khuntkatti* status, as they were all descendants of the founder of the village who had reclaimed lands from virgin forests. However, they were not residents of Loharda, but of an adjoining village Uligutu, which had been the original village of their ancestor who was forced to move out to Loharda when their family had become too numerous to occupy Uligutu. While the objectors convinced the Attestation Officer of the justness of their claim, the ruling was later overturned by the Settlement Officer who observed, 'This is all irrelevant. The fact that the law may be too inelastic does not entitle us to strain the evidence to meet a priori conceptions. A Section 83 [i.e. concerning *khuntkatti* status] officer is bound to ascertain the bare facts and apply the law literally.[21]' In another case, objectors claimed *khuntkatti* status in the two villages of Thakuragutu and Bachomhatu in Ajodhya *pir,* stating that Nandu Ho, their ancestor, had founded both villages. Although the Settlement Officer was inclined to disallow the claim, it was later argued that these two villages had earlier formed two *tolas* (neighbourhoods) of a single village and *khuntkatti* status was accorded to the objectors.[22]

The instances discussed above are only a few representative objections filed by Ho tenants to acquire *khuntkatti* status in course of the resettlement of 1913-18. The archives of the Chaibasa Collectorate record innumerable cases filed by tenants of all almost every *pir* in the estate, in which oral testimonies were zealously collected and written down, and genealogies constructed by colonial officers in an attempt to arrive at an 'authentic' version of Ho history. Custom, however, can hardly be fixed in time; it is necessarily living and is constantly recreated, as are the memories of the past, which vary according to the interests, situation and needs of the present. Genealogies, too, were living memories. As Scott has shown, 'elaborate genealogies … are a vast portfolio of possible connections, most of which remain in the shadows but could, if necessary, be summoned. The more turbulent the social environment, the more frequently groups fission and recombine, the greater the likelihood that the portfolio of shadow ancestors will come into play' (2009: 232). Like the Kachins of Southeast Asia, the Hos of Kolhan drew upon 'shadow ancestors' in this moment of social turbulence to buttress claims which were not simply a spontaneous expression of local memories, but a conscious representation of a new community identity.

Concluding remarks

The evidence illustrated above shows that the response of the Hos on the *khuntkatti* issue took the form of a legal encounter in which the Ho tenants put forth their claims, both just and fabricated, in the context of new tenancy legislations. Attempts to carve out a space for themselves within colonial rule did not require Ho tenants to resort to violence in order to redress grievances. Nor did they fall back upon a silent subversion of British rule through a disregard of the new regulations and laws in everyday life. Instead we see a consciously articulated attempt to establish their status in accordance with the requirements of British colonial law and by framing their claims according to British legal conventions. Such attempts at securing self-interest on part of a large section of the community and the articulation of individual rights in the context of a changing legal and agrarian framework can be construed as a silent, non-violent revolution.

The movement to establish *khuntkatti* status also revealed the various dimensions of the self-representations of Ho community identity. On some occasions, the Hos spoke of themselves as a bloc, especially when they put forth claims of egalitarianism. As their oral evidence was transcribed into written testimony, the boundaries between the individual interests of the Hos and their group concerns became blurred, so that in certain cases, as Alessandro Portelli put it, 'personal "truth" [came to] coincide with shared "imagination" ' (1991: 49). At other times, the reality of the fractures within their community – the divisions between the elites and the non-elites, the original clearers and later settlers – became evident. In filing legal claims to *khuntkatti* status, the ordinary Hos preferred to act on an individual basis, rather than as a community acting unitedly against the colonial administration. The framing of their identity and reconstruction of their history was largely centered around their villages, though on occasions there were also references to inter-village solidarities. Thus the Ho tenants were not talking in the same voice, even when confronted with the generalizations of colonial categories.

Khuntkatti status was sought by the tenants to build up a new colonial 'legal' identity, which in certain cases marked a separation from their living customs. Rather than rejecting the imposed colonial categories, Hos appropriated them to their own advantage and to preserve their self-interest in the new set-up of land rights. Confronting the colonial rulers with this new legal status was, in fact, another form of resistance. In this resistance movement, genealogies and family histories which constituted part of the inner domain of the tribe where the state could not intervene, were utilized by Ho tenants in their fight for rights in the public domain. Thus a situation was created whereby they could force the British to ascertain the veracity of their claims on their own terms. In this fight they sometimes succeeded, sometimes failed, but above all they were agents rather objects of change.

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Notes

[1] The colonial construction of 'tribe' with its racial, evolutionist connotations has been debated at length by scholars in the last two decades. Adivasi today is a political term which has gained currency since the mid-twentieth century. For details, see among others, Hardiman (1987), Devalle (1992), Xaxa (1998), Damodaran (2011), Rycroft and Dasgupta (2011), Das Gupta (2012). In this paper the terms Adivasi and tribe have been used interchangeably to indicate indigenous ethnic communities, socially organized on lines distinct from 'caste'.

[2] Ramgarh Magistrate to Bayly, 30 June, 1817, Govt. of Bengal, Judicial Criminal Proceedings, No. 39 of 29 July 1817, West Bengal State Archives, hereafter WBSA.

[3] Roughsedge to Metcalf, 9 May 1820, Chotanagpur Commissioner's Political Despatch Register, vol. 27, Bihar State Archives.

[4] Wilkinson to Tickell, 5 May 1837, Bengal Judicial Criminal Proceedings, No 15, 6 June 1837, WBSA.

[5] A subdivision consisting of a cluster of villages, headed by a *manki*.

[6] One of the best-known tribal movements of the period, Birsa Munda's *ulgulan* (Great Tumult) took place in the region south of Ranchi. For a discussion of the *ulgulan*, see Singh (1983).

[7] *Bhuinhari* was the term used by the Oraons, while *khuntkatti* referred to the similar usage among the Mundas and the Hos.

[8] This includes Porahat, Seraikela, Kharsawan, Anandpur, Kera, Manoharpur.

[9] McPherson, 'Note on the Kolhan Resettlement', Tuckey 1920, p. 86.

[10] Ibid., p. 88.

[11] Statement of Ringsu Manki of Deoposhi village, 9 July 1914, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Proceedings A, No 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, British Library Oriental and India Office Collections (hereafter OIOC), P 9797.

[12] 'Note of Statements of *mankis* and *mundas* at conference held in Chaibasa', 8 July 1914, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Proceedings A, No 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, OIOC, P 9797.

[13] 'Statement of *mankis* and *mundas* at conference held in Chaibasa,' 9 July 1914, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Proceedings A, No 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, OIOC, P 9797.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Copy of Memorial presented to Lieutenant Governor of Bihar and Orissa by Hos of Chaibasa, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Proceedings A, No 6, Enclosure 4, March 1915, OIOC, P 9797.

[17] D.M. Panna's 'Note on the Kolhan Settlement', 11 September 1914, Govt. of Bihar and Orissa, Revenue Proceedings A, No 6, Appendix K, Enclosure 13, March 1915, OIOC, P 9797.

[18] 'Statement of *mankis* and *mundas* at conference held in Chaibasa,' 9 July 1914.

[19] Case No. 8/89 of 1915-16, Kolhan Thana No. 1, K 41, Sl 21 of 1912-17, Chaibasa Collectorate Record Room (hereafter CCRR).

[20] Case No. 463, Thana No. 31, Basta No. 4, K 41, Sl 163 of 1916-17, CCRR.

[21] Case No 42/89 of 1915, Loharda Thana No 5, Basta No 1, K41 Sl 44 of 1916-17, CCRR.

[22] Objection No 928, village Bachamhatu, Thana 11, Ajodhya Pir, K 41 Sl 70 of 1916-17. CCRR.

ARTICLE

ANTHROPOLOGICAL ARCHIVES AND 'CHIASMIC' TIME IN MODERN INDIA

BY DANIEL RYCROFT

Abstract: The Government of India Act was formalized in 1935 as a means of transferring administrative power from the British Raj to the Indian National Congress. It introduced a new framework for the governance of 'Scheduled Areas,' i.e. those regions inhabited predominantly by Adivasis (literally 'original inhabitants'), or India's Indigenous and 'tribal' peoples, such as 'the Mundas.' Codifying the histories of these areas according to their occupation by Adivasi societies, the Act prompted contemporary anthropological research that questioned colonial categories of racial difference. Contingent and regionally nuanced concepts emerged, such as 'racial' minorities, Adivasi rights, and social solidarity that refocused public and administrative attention on Adivasi history and heritage. These concepts are easily forgotten in polarized debates on the workings of assimilationist vs. protectionist ideologies in respect of Adivasi peoples and lands. Yet such shifts prompted a revision of wider temporal and cultural relations between majority (mainstream) and minority (tribal) communities. The paper aims to explore such interfaces through the metaphor of the archive and the prospect of 'holism', and with close reference to the medium of portraiture. In particular, images of Birsa Munda – an Adivasi freedom-fighter from the Ranchi district of Jharkhand – are foregrounded as a means to interpret the emergent relationship of Indian anthropology to 'the Mundas' and to 'the nation.' Signified in different ways by Birsa Munda, his followers, and those interested in making the posthumous prophet-rebel visible again within the political and cultural parameters of modern India, these relations became acquired dynamism through their temporal complexity and embodiment.

Keywords: heritage, nation, tribe, time, holism, chiasm

Introduction

In the pre-independence phase, the Indian intelligentsia apprehended afresh the *time of the nation* according to shared futures that disavowed colonial notions of difference, in respect of pasts that were either co-owned by different regional communities or else considered distinctive (see Datta-Majumder 1955; Bose 1957: 177). Some aspects of 'tribal' political culture, such as village-level councils or *Panchayats* (consisting of five members), easily found their way into the nation's rubric, as these resonated with Gandhian and similar perspectives on decentralized citizenship (see Uberoi et al 2007: 39, 43) and the histories and values associated with regional democracy in Asia. Yet some aspects, such as the history of Munda, Santal, Gond, and Bhil rebellions that promoted ideals of decentralized governance that accorded more with subaltern consciousness, were seemingly at odds with pan-Indian concepts of inter-community 'co-existence' (Roy et al 1945; Haimendorf 1949: 148). This was because Adivasi rebellions disrupted nationalist value systems that idealized tribal integration and social unity (as perceived from non-Adivasi perspectives). Any anthropological or historical work exploring these rebellions in the pre-independence phase would necessarily also be compelled to question the prominence afforded to the national mainstream in defining political identities. Yet a good number of works emerged on this topic after the inauguration of the Government of India Act (see Rycroft 2012a; 2016). This could explain why, in 1938, a Congress-oriented artist and advocate of national cultural heritage, Upendra Maharathi, chose to draw a haunting yet compelling portrait of the Adivasi freedom-fighter Birsa Munda (Fig. 1). Was the work commissioned by the Congress with the primary intention of making visible the Munda rebellion? Or was it introduced into the national fold as a means to address and even resolve tensions, associated not only with rebellious pasts but also the politics of minority identities in the present?

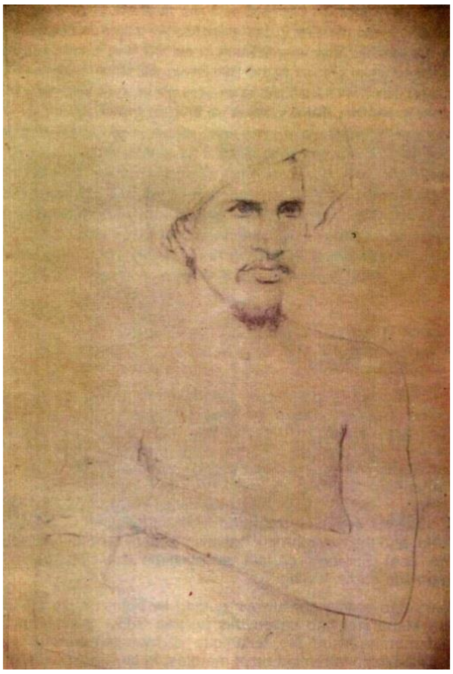

Fig. 1 Birsa Bhagwan. U. Maharathi, 1938. Pencil drawing, Patna Museum.

Birsa was the self-proclaimed Munda leader who spearheaded the 'rebellious upheaval' or *Ulgulan* (using the Mundari language) in the Chota Nagpur region of southern Bihar (equating to modern-day Jharkhand), from 1898 to 1900. Interestingly, his political radicalism was identified by subsequent interlocutors, notably the lawyer-turned-anthropologist Sarat Chandra Roy, as the latest phase of an evolving Munda political consciousness that incorporated earlier agitations, such as the Sardar movement (Roy 1912: 160-162), and that defined 'the modern history of the Mundas and their country' (Roy 1912: 102-199). It was the Mundas' *khunt-katti* system of ancestral rights to settlement and cultivation that preoccupied both the anthropologist and the agitators. All of this mattered to colonial administrators who were coming to the conclusion following their suppression of the *Ulgulan*, and their imprisonment of Birsa, that affected regions had been mismanaged during the late nineteenth-century to the extent that the tenancy rights of the Adivasi population had been overlooked (see Rycroft 2016). A renewed effort was made in the first decade of the twentieth century to readdress this, a move that resulted in much attention being given to Roy's social and ethno-historical research and in the belated implementation of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act.

Such transformations in the political, administrative and anthropological interpretation of the Mundas' political heritage inform my analysis quite centrally, for I am interested in questioning how the portraiture associated with Birsa pertained both to the *Ulgulan* itself, incorporating the aforementioned tensions and histories, as well as to the post-suppression dynamics of anthropological dialogue and tribal integration. My entry point into the *Ulgulan* period is the relationship between Birsa and his followers (the Birsaites), who have featured in later ethnographical work, notably by K.S. Singh (1966), that explored the cultural and political aspects of Birsa's movements, as well as the legacy of these in the Jharkhand region. The point of assessing this relationship at the outset is that it gives us clues about the politics of Birsa's visibility as a leader, which in turn help us to understand the anthropological and national significance of his portraiture. My analysis later develops into an exploration of the interfaces that have been propelled by a deep engagement with Birsa's image and the *Ulgulan* as an open historical entity, in terms of the movement or oscillation between diverse subjects. I aim to generate some new insights concerning the historical emergence of Indian anthropology as a field of archival inter-relation, especially in the pre-independence phase when the cross-currents of national and 'tribal' heritage were animated by what I am calling the reversibility of the archive-as-epistemology and epistemology-as-archive. My terms of reference are focused on Birsa's portraiture, as this generated opportunities for viewers to learn or know afresh the vexed relation of 'the Mundas' and 'their country.'

PART ONE

The issue of presence

It should be noted at the outset that Maharathi's portrait is a direct adaptation of a photograph that purported to show Birsa as a prisoner, during the *Ulgulan*, i.e. after his capture and arrest in January 1900, and before his death in Ranchi jail in June 1900 (see Fig. 2). I have my reservations about this reading of the photograph, even if it was documented as such in the work of K.S. Singh following its original circulation by S.C. Roy with the caption of 'Sick Birsa' (Singh 1966: 130). Rather, I argue for a re-reading of the photograph in the light of the devotional aesthetics brought to it via Maharathi's rendering, and in respect of the contention that, in all likelihood, the photographic portrait was generated during Birsa's initial imprisonment in 1895, that is to say well before the *Ulgulan* started. At this time, Birsa was a very popular prophet-healer amongst Munda and other subaltern communities in Jharkhand. This presence would give us more clues about Birsa's visibility, not only at the time but also during the aftermath of the suppression of the *Ulgulan* (that occurred in 1899-1900). Between then and Roy's publication of Munda ethnographies (from 1910-12), and on the back of this anthropological re-evaluation of Munda history and social relations, new attitudes started to emerge amongst colonialists, administrators, missionaries and scholars about Birsa and his movement.

I am keen to question how this discursive presence pertained in diverse ways to Birsa's pre-rebellion identity as a social and spiritual leader. This is because it opens out the duration and sites of Munda consciousness away from the *Ulgulan* itself to incorporate the political heritages and political/aesthetic cultures associated with this movement. And it is such processes of incorporation and their embodiment that I am really interested in understanding. In this analysis, it is the figure of 'the Birsaite,' or the disciples, followers, and associates of Birsa who also became well-known to the colonial administration during the suppression, that accrues some historical and analytical significance. For they saw Birsa differently to colonialists and later anthropologists, meaning that embodied sites of difference can also be called into question. Interestingly, despite its iconic focus, the portrait history of Birsa is a good starting point for such work. It is notable that Birsa was arrested on charges of leading a skirmish in August 1895 that resulted in his temporary imprisonment at Ranchi and his being displayed as a prisoner to Munda devotees at the time of his outdoor trial (Singh 1966: 67-73). First, Birsa was seen as a prisoner being taken to Ranchi. On 23rd August 1895, 'the Sub-Inspector from Khunti … entered Birsa's room: he was found asleep, his body smeared with turmeric. He struggled violently when hand-cuffs were slipped on his wrists … Birsa was carried in a doli. There was a big crowd to see him all along the route and he smiled and laughed' (Singh 1966: 67). Within days, crowds gathered near his base at Chalkad to welcome the prophet home, as he had predicted that, if caught, he would reappear. It was not until the following month, however, that he was seen again in public: 'The Deputy Commissioner explained to them [his followers, known as Birsaites] that Birsa was not God, as he was neither merciful nor benevolent. The crowd became more angry. Seven persons were arrested and they volunteered to be sent to jail with Birsa' (Singh 1966: 72). The trial was thus postponed until November 1895, when Birsa was imprisoned for more than two years. As intimated, we are compelled to register Birsa's re-appearance, but not in the ways predicted by Birsa or anticipated by his followers.

All this would suggest that a certain kind of 'presence' was afforded to Birsa around this time by the Birsaites. This presence inevitably changed as the dynamics of the political movement instilled a different leader-disciple, or *guru-chela*, relationship during the 1897-1900 phase, culminating in the *Ulgulan,* when Birsa was released from his first term of imprisonment and embarked on a new campaign to assert subaltern Munda rule in the region (Roy 1912: 192-197; Singh 1966: 80-134). The point of focusing on the pre-*Ulgulan* phase is to account for the historical production of the photograph (see Fig. 2), which Singh claims was taken in the final months of Birsa's life following his capture in January 1900, more in terms of Birsaite notions of presence than physical appearance. Rather than documenting a sick subaltern body, in all likelihood the photographic event coincided with Birsa's public display by the police in September 1895. The ramifications of this contention are quite profound, for it would cast Birsa's presence in terms of a relatively 'non-violent' situation (as compared to the militant dynamics of the *Ulgulan* and its suppression). This of course would be more palatable to subsequent Gandhian ideas of collectivization and nationhood. It is interesting, therefore, that Maharathi re-used the image in a manner that alluded via its own pictorial calmness to this non-violent phase in the life of Birsa, even as anthropologists convinced themselves that it depicted something else. Images related to this photograph, such as 'Captive Birsa' (Singh 1966: 101) that show Birsa with a group of police of army personnel, indicate that the process heralded by Roy as 'Birsa Munda Captured and Conducted to Ranchi' in January 1900 (Roy 1912: 342) could in fact have been Birsa Munda Captured and Displayed to his Followers (in September 1895). I am not making these contentions with the aim of discrediting Roy or Singh, who both assert that the photographs pertain to the suppression of the *Ulgulan*. Rather, I am calling into question the timing of the initial portrait as a means to help us understand how Birsa would have been viewed by others involved in the agitation and the trial event, such as his disciples and followers, rather than by the colonial jurisdiction or missionary photographers etc. For it is this attitude of devotion to Munda/Adivasi/subaltern leadership that requires a fuller understanding, given that it was also captured and propelled via Maharathi's portrait, perhaps as a means to generate synergy between Congress-led and 'tribal' notions of belonging in modern India.

The issue of presence is thus integral to the formation and later artistic reinterpretation of the photographic portrait. Whilst it would be unlikely that Maharathi would have been familiar with the complexity of the historical issues outlined above, his re-envisioning of Birsa in terms of the Birsaites' spiritual qualities (as embodiments of the quest for truth and justice) rather than their overtly rebellious personae suggests that two moments in the life and afterlife of Birsa can be productively brought together. The first of these would be Birsa's visibility as a prisoner before the *Ulgulan*, and the second would be Birsa's visibility as a spiritual leader or embodiment of *dharma* not only after the *Ulgulan* itself but also after the colonial reinterpretation of this upheaval in the following decade. Rather than identifying the two images in terms of their inter-visuality, or their iconic casting of Birsa in both instances, I am interested in addressing the relative 'outsides' of the two images, or that which is suggested but not shown by the images: namely the proposition that his presence can be absorbed via a particular kind of visual recognition from viewers, whether in terms of Birsa's followers (before the *Ulgulan*) or his admirers after the *Ulgulan* (in the lead-up to national independence). This contextual and, it must be said, rather unpredictable attitude is required, because if we probe such spaces of presence carefully, for example by linking the images to representations of time in the ethno-historical works by Roy (from which they generated), we may arrive at a new understanding of how and why Birsa and the *Ulgulan* – as opened 'archives' – not only became visible, but also accrued resonance as national heritage in the early twentieth century. The idea is not to re-engage such Birsa-facing spaces in a quest for closure about Birsa's cultural and political identity. Rather, it is first to question how the images generated their own temporal dynamics and then to comprehend these dynamics, in respect of the interplay between subaltern and national movements, and between national and colonial epistemologies.

The portrait demonstrated Maharathi's own revivalist commitment towards Bihar's cultural heritage, to the extent that the Congress would invite him to design the *pandal* (temporary pavilion) built for their conference at Ramgarh, just north of Ranchi, in 1940. Rendering him less as a rebel and more as a visionary, Birsa became visible in ways that made him comparable, for example, to the historical Buddha who was another of Maharathi's muses. Informed by *swadeshi* ideas – of economic, artistic, intellectual and cultural self-reliance (see Raina and Habib 1996: 29; Sartori 2003: 276; Bhushan and Garfield 2011: xv) – Maharathi's invocation of the region's spiritual leaders sustained a pluralistic heritage of unity-in-diversity. He responded to the task of making Birsa legible in terms that were not so much associated with southern Bihar (now Jharkhand), i.e. as a region that was once dominated by 'tribal' inhabitants and that included districts listed in the Government of India Act, but that concurred with national experiences of civilizational continuity and change. Although this process fostered some interplay between visual facts, new conceptual priorities and ephemeral 'moments of relation' (Thrift 2001: viii), Maharathi did not render problematic the terms through which Birsa would re-appear, some 38 years after his demise as a prisoner in the jail at Ranchi, the administrative centre of Chota Nagpur. Rather in his retrieval of an archival photograph that depicted the hand-cuffed Birsa (see Fig. 2) Maharathi also sustained a process of re-archiving. This process adds something quite important to the temporalities (or the dynamics and politics of time) that I am calling into question under the rubric of anthropological 'archives'. For these enable visual historians to relate Maharathi's re-use of the de-archived image to Roy's earlier re-use of the archival photograph. This point in turn helps us to comprehend the relationship between the colonial/missionary archive, through which Roy most probably came to witness and engage the photograph in the first instance, and the national/colonial readership of Roy's tracts on 'the Mundas'.

As Maharathi's anthropologist contemporary, Roy had earlier set the process of de-archiving in motion in 1912 when he published the photograph, along with his important documentation of 'tribal' settlements, in *The Mundas and their Country* (1912: 72). [1] Maharathi would later translate the image of captivity, which emphasized the fixity of the past-as-photograph (see Sekula 1986: 3; Burton 2005: 3), into a prospect of immanent freedom. This radical and highly moralized concept (see Prasad 2009: 6) also prompted some interplay between Adivasi and national notions of utopian futures, thereby aligning in some ways the 'time of the Birsaites' with the 'time of the Congress'. Via this dialogue, what I am calling 'rebel time' (or the radicalization of ancestral pasts and autonomous futures by insurgents in the present) and 'heritage time' (or the invocation of civilizational identities and values) came to coalesce, in such a way that their mutuality would be utilized to re-frame both Birsa and his legacy. We thus need to probe how these various constructs of past, present and future acquired a degree of mutuality. The turn to Roy's representations of Birsa, and of what was then considered to constitute

Munda identity and modern history, is also necessary. For Maharathi's artistic borrowing points to a complex representational history, not only of Birsa as a distinct and celebrated entity, but also of his photographic image (see Rycroft 2004; Rycroft 2009) through which mainstream (and anthropological) and subaltern (and 'tribal') notions of time (see Hirsch 2008: 23) entangled, and created new possibilities for 'inter-cultural' recognition, whether in terms of regional identity and/or tribal belonging (see Bose 1954: 256).[2] It also points to a specific historical milieu in which the re-animation of the 'boundaries of reality' (Gordon et al 2010: 6), which incorporated utopian futures *and* dystopian pasts (also see Souillac 2011: 8), can be explored further. The unfolding arena of 'Indian' anthropology provided an imaginative space in which 'utopian embodimentation' (Johnson 2003: 397; also see Thompson and Zahavi 2006: 80-82) became a meaningful and ethical proposition, for Roy also re-visited his earlier representations of Munda 'fanaticism' (from 1912) to re-cast Birsa Munda in the 1930s as an embodiment of *dharma* thereby assimilating his legacy according to overtly national values.

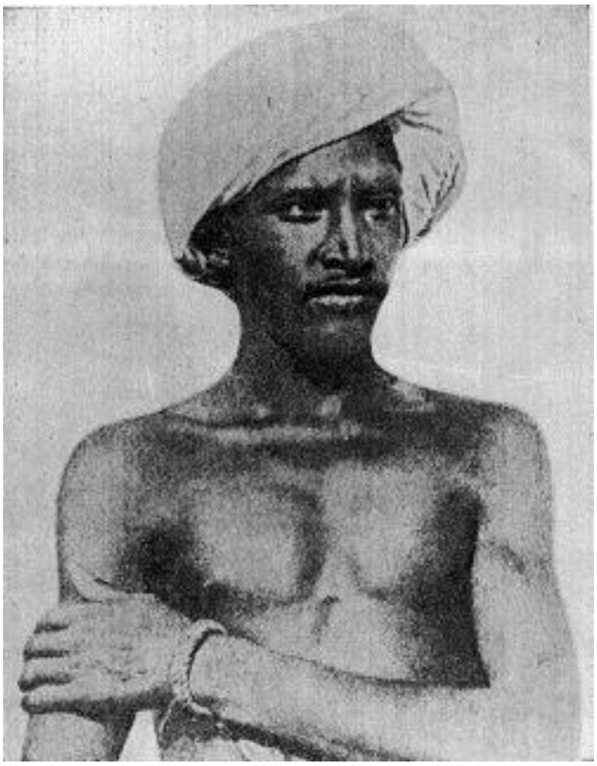

Fig. 2 Birsa Munda. Anonymous photograph, as republished in Singh (1966: 101), after Roy (1912: 72)

Engaging diverse pasts

As an anti-colonial rebel, Birsa and his legacy came to stand not only for Munda-related claims, i.e. the recognition of ancestral land rights, but also for community solidarity and heritage-oriented futures at a national level. Seen through these wider idioms, Birsa's charismatic leadership and his implementation of a prophetic religious discourse that combined aspects of Munda, Hindu and Christian beliefs and customs (see Roy 1912: 188), acquired resonance. Following Roy's lead, Maharathi integrated Birsa within the imagined nation as an embodiment of a fluid notion of *dharma*, which pertains to the ordering and alignment of the part (*pinda*) vis-à-vis the whole (*brahmanda*) (Mahapatra 2006: 16). Relatable through the asymmetry of *dharmic* and *adharmic* (non-righteous, disordered) experience (see Mahapatra 2006: 17), temporal aspects of *dharma* can engender bodily and social sensations (Sarukkai 2009: 41) that incorporate sight, touch, and other aspects of time-consciousness. It has been asserted that in their combination, these rework 'the texture of the feel and the outcome of the everyday' in such a way that these could be 'breathed differently' (Thrift 2001: 4). Incorporating aspects of collective memory and forgetting, and intimating previous *experiences* of viewing Birsa – as a leader, prisoner, and archival entity – Maharathi's image defined a *dharmic* devotional aesthetic (see Garfield and Bhushan 2011: xix) that both speaks with and contradicts the original photograph. I contend that this repositioning could have generated for Congress viewers of the Maharathi work a numinous feeling, and contemporary meaning as liberationist (Prasad 2006: 6). Whilst Maharathi's agenda might now be seen, especially by exponents of Adivasi cultural rights, in terms of cultural appropriation and 'internal' colonialism, this article will not focus on this perception. Rather it will respond to the historical issue of how the image of Birsa became transportable, in temporal and intercultural terms, across the utopian/dystopian boundaries that marked the Birsaite heritage as distinct from, yet also as relatable to, Indian modernity and its integrated futures.[3]

In this process, a new *dharmic* politics of time assumed a modern, secular, and public role (see Bhushan and Garfield 2011). Ananda Coomaraswamy annotated *dharmic* time as the human potential to apprehend 'temporal "things" [as] both real and unreal'. (1947: 6) The philosophy of time as a productive, multidirectional, and experiential notion corresponded with neo-Vedantic principles that became prominent in the *swadeshi* era. It is worthwhile therefore to trace the role of an Adivasi 'body' in its ability – via artistic mediation – to propel such kinds of engagements and dynamics. In abstract terms, the idea of *dharma* delineates principles of unity that integrate humanity and the world into one entity that alludes to an ultimate reality. For Birsa to have been seen as an entity that corresponds with such values, it would have been important for his image and legacy not only to define what was imaginable as the tribal world (i.e. as somewhat distinct from what was considered to be modern or mainstream India), but also for these to drive forward a certain kind of integrative logic. In modern India this was discernible in non-dichotomous spiritual *and* material domains, and approachable across ethical *and* political pathways. Neo-Vedantism celebrated and sought unity at inter-personal, inter-community, inter-national and universal levels (Malhotra 1966; Halbfass 1985: 5-7). Informing an engaging field of 'comparative' philosophy, which countered Hegelian assumptions about Indian civilization (Halbfass 1985), it also shaped contributions to anthropology in the pre-independence phase, as exemplified by Roy (1938). Adherents proposed that by adopting a Vedantic position or *darsana* in the present (*bhavat*), a fuller realisation of Time (*Kala*) – as the union of past and future – could be ascertained (Coomaraswamy 1947: 9). It is important therefore to address the making of Birsa in highly nationalized terms, as the means through which such unities, and all that they stood for in the Congress political imaginary, could be harnessed. How did the bodily subject, as the mediator of past and future temporalities, and of private (experienced) and public (remembered) spaces, realize the possibilities of *dharmic* time 'in practice', i.e. in a space that extended through yet beyond ‘tradition’ in its diversity (Halbfass 1985: 3; Bhushan and Garfield 2011: 13)?

As viewers encountered Maharathi’s portrait, they were not only reminded of Birsa. As a reference to Roy’s anthropological work, they were also prompted (in the manner of the artist himself) to register the significance of Roy’s own de- and re-archiving impulses, not only in respect of the Birsa image, but also of Birsaite heritage and Munda history. As intimated, such processes developed through the work of K.S. Singh (1966), whose folklore-inspired historical study of Birsa and the Birsaites has since achieved much cultural, social and epistemological influence. Despite its historiographic limitations, *The Dust Storm and the Hanging Mist* (1966) is credited as inspiring a host of Subaltern analyses and narratives (see Guha 1983; Devi 2002). But all of these leave unquestioned the initial ‘integration’ of Birsa by his followers, whose lives and outlooks – in a manner that predicted later interlocutors – were largely defined by the prophet. Further research is therefore needed to ascertain how the portrait’s facilitation of instantaneous and ‘intensive remembering’ (*abhiksnam*) (Coomaraswamy 29147: 13) of a utopian future, or a future-made-present, can be assessed historically and in ways that are not necessarily dependent upon a Vedanta-inspired belief in the notion of *dharma*. Although the entry of Birsa into the national imaginary is a historical anthropological process usually associated with K.S. Singh, its *swadeshi* and visual dynamics cannot go un-noticed.

These *swadeshi* dynamics raise complex methodological questions. How should anthropological historians broach these sites of heritage that (a) enabled archival technologies to be re-drawn in respect of both ‘tribal’ and non-tribal heritage, (b) connected anthropology, via utopian embodimentation, to the mainstream community, and (c) enlivened spaces of visibility and (devotional) consciousness at a time of Congress-led national collectivization? I assess such questions in terms of archival and visual (i.e. embodied) time as a means of contributing to a conversation on ‘… how the historian can use variants of utopian thinking and action [in terms of simultaneous interactions of personal and political ideas, desires, constraints, and effects] to explore the specificity of a time and place.’ (Gordon et al 2010: 4) Whilst some scholars, namely André Béteille, have presented themselves – with good reason – as ‘anti-utopian’ (see Gupta 2005), such explorations can also be very productive. As intimated, the article has a phenomenological orientation (see Halstead 2008: 5; Souillac 2011:7). This has developed via my own relational or ‘open attitude’ (Finlay 2009: 12) towards interdisciplinary fields, and through ‘the lineages of inter-relation’ (Thrift 2001: 6) that I have activated according to my own ethnographic sensibilities (see Rycroft and Devy 2014). As noted, the analysis focuses on the relationship between political resistance as engendered by ‘the Mundas’ (see Roy 1912; Singh 1966; Guha 1983), and intellectual *swaraj* or ‘self-rule’ (see Sartori 2006: 276; Uberoi et al 2007: 17) that was not normally Adivasi-centric. This relationship became manifest in an increasingly moralized milieu of Indology that, in a *non*-sectarian gesture (also see Guha 1997: 36), extended to anthropology via Roy: ‘Against the backdrop of colonialism, nineteenth century theories of modern science … served as frames for the derivation of a morality of the body, the body-politic and the cosmos.’ (Raina and Habib 1996: 10) As such, the anthropologists' own 'theoretical heritages' (Desjarlais and Throop 2011: 89), which covered humanity, selfhood, culture, etc., would again come into focus, but this time in a direct relation to the body-politics of the aftermath of the *Ulgulan*.

PART TWO

Anthropological and archival departures

In its re-consideration of epistemological and visual cultural shifts, and Adivasi contributions to these, the analysis relates to my previous work on Adivasi resistance (Rycroft 2005; Rycroft 2011) and on the broader 'politics of belonging' in India (Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011; Rycroft 2012a, 2012b). Here, however, I address issues of temporality in new ways. I move away from a historical preoccupation with narratives of insurgency and counter-insurgency (Guha 1983; Rycroft 2005, Rycroft 2012c), to consider experiences of intercultural 'temporal dynamics' (Thompson and Zahavi 2006: 77; also see Wilkerson 2010). As noted by Thompson and Zahavi: 'Just as there is no spatial object without a background, there is no experience without a temporal horizon' (2006: 77). I attend to these points by touching on a range of key concepts in archival studies, such as archival sites/futures/mediations (see Blouin and Rosenberg 2006), archival 'heritage' (Hamilton et al 2002: 10), archival 'communities' (Bastian and Alexander 2009), 'autonomous' archives (Moore and Pell 2010) and 'radical' archives (Zeitlyn 2012: 474). I also address the notions of reversibility and relationality, as well as the workings of these in phenomenology and 'Indian' philosophy. These notions will enforce my contention that archives, heritage, and history became interdependent and mutual entities through ethical 'embodimentation' and mnemonic citizenship (see Burton 2005: 2; Mahapatra 2006: 22). More particularly, I contend that this interdependence assumed its own intercultural relevance, especially in its enlivening of anthropological praxis and of the possibilities for *collectivization* – between people, and between human and non-human realms – that the meeting of 'Indian' science and 'Indian' philosophy encouraged in the early twentieth century (Roy 1912: 325; Raina and Habib 1996).

Jharkhand is a new state comprising southern Bihar whose population in the pre-colonial era was dominated by Adivasi communities. During colonialism, Adivasis were considered as aborigines and known in racial terms as 'Kol' (dark) or Kolarian (Roy 1912: 9-10; Hutton 1935; Roy 1946; also see Rycroft 2012b). They referred to themselves as *horoko* (people) as distinct from *diko* (others). Within these Kolarian societies, Mundas, Bhumij (Hinduised Mundas), Santals, Hos (i.e. *horo*, human), Birhors (forest people), Oraons and Kharias (amalgams of Mundas and Oraons) survived as distinctive 'tribes', at least according to Roy (1912: 27, 69-70), who highlighted the civilizational and intercultural qualities of these community histories (1912: 27-8). His work added an additional layer of interpretation onto a complex terrain of ethno-history that has since become the grounds for both political recognition, i.e. ethno-regionalism, in Jharkhand and related anthropological research (see Rycroft and Dasgupta 2011; Rycroft 2012a; Rycroft 2016). The utopian spaces of potential coexistence, between Birsa's religious/political movements and the nation, thus did not emerge in a vacuum. Roy's work on 'the Mundas' helped to configure these dynamics. The concept of an overtly 'Birsaite' heritage thus registered in and as a shifting intercultural matrix, which comprised distinct yet related vectors of time and heritage, and of being and belonging. This would acquire more resonance in the decades following Roy's initial liberation/dissemination of the archival image in 1912, for example in the artistic work of Maharathi.

I use the phrase 'Birsaite' heritage to address an entanglement of vexed temporal horizons. In Roy's era, these included collective Munda memory as this pertained to *khunt-katti* lands, i.e. the areas clearly identified with Munda ancestors and inhabited in accordance with customary law, and was invoked during prolonged 'tribal' agitations including the *Ulgulan* (see Roy 1912: 62-3; 65-6; 193). In the administrative archive, 'tribal' heritage also incorporated the jurisdictions concerning *Bhuinhari* lands, i.e. those areas that were once *khunt-katti* but that became distinct, in tenancy and taxation terms, following the introduction of centralised governance in Chota Nagpur (Roy 1912: 95, 156-9). Taken together, popular and administrative memories informed a new anthropological archive or epistemology inscribed by Roy (1912: 113-4) and developed by Singh (1966), which also documented 'tribal' memories of resistance, via rights claims and experiences of conflict. So how did these exponents of 'Indian' anthropology navigate first the entanglement of Munda history and heritage and then the integration of these elements within wider anthropological/ethical/governmental frames?

Historical works on 'tribal' peoples and 'tribal' movements typically disassociate *archival* cultures and anthropological *effects* from issues of citizenship and belonging. Whilst I am not making the claim that Birsa should be considered as an 'archon' (the magistral governor of pasts), given his integral presence in the anthropological and Birsaite heritage, some effort should be made to assess why Roy felt compelled to broach 'traditional' and contemporary Munda history in inter-archival terms. For many of his 'tribal' contemporaries, Birsa – as *Dharti Aba* (Father of the Earth) – embodied ancient and modern, as well as cosmological and social, time. As such, his arrests (before and during the *Ulgulan*), the *Ulgulan* itself (as comprising an autonomous future), and the inscription of a Birsaite legacy – within both a revised Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act and an emergent anthropological discourse after the movement's suppression – all contributed new meanings to these temporal dimensions. These are variously remembered or forgotten in diverse administrative, social, historiographic, political and commemorative contexts. The resonance of these archival meanings depended on whether and how respondents would recognise the intangible aspects of the Birsaite heritage, as involving Mundas and non-Mundas alike.

Encountering holism

This heritage was first articulated by Roy, who researched and published a series of articles on 'the Mundas' in the *Modern Review* between 1910 and 1912. [4] Anticipating his monograph, this series activated the aftermath of the *Ulgulan* in a manner that would speak to legal, administrative, academic and heritage communities in modern India. Roy was a member of a Hindu reformist group, the

Brahmo Samaj. As a lawyer-turned-ethnographer he became an influential figure in India's new field of 'post-western' anthropology, evidenced by transcultural interconnections and related experiences of ethnographic time (see Halstead 2008: 5). The Brahmo Samaj shaped the intellectual contours of modern India after the turn of the century (see Bhushan and Garfield 2011). As is becoming clear, their utopian ideals of *dharma* could be activated in relation to both non-tribal (modern, neo-Hindu) *and* 'tribal' histories and cultures. The dynamics of this Indological turn have not been studied in respect of the Birsaite heritage, yet they demonstrated a capacity for the academic *absorption* of 'tribal' cultures (see Bose 1957).

These dynamics paralleled wider social contexts, in which members of 'tribal' society would adapt linguistic, religious, and political norms according to dominant communities. Thus, integrative two-way flows of absorption and adaptation (i.e. reversals) connected anthropologists and their 'tribal' subjects. Intriguingly, at least according to Roy, a productive journeying between these new subject positions – considered then in terms of inner development and intercultural understanding – was premised on 'subjective processes of *self-forgetting*' (Roy 1938: 150, italics added). These processes might nowadays be referred to variously as 'unlearning,' if one assumed an empathetic view of *dharma* and absorption or, alternatively, as cultural silencing if a more critical Subaltern position on adaptation was assumed (Guha 1997). Yet in Roy's time, the Bengali intelligentsia fashioned a radical *swadeshi* approach to sociology that redefined the nation's body politic according to a particular kind of coexistence between the individual and the collective. This process revived regional 'history,' reversed modernity's hierarchical relation of past and present (Sartori 2003: 281; also see Goodwin and Taylor 1982: 11-12), and prompted inter-subjective relations between the anthropologist-as-subject and anthropological subjects: notably 'tribal' pasts, national futures, as well as those people (such as Birsa) and those communities (such as 'the Mundas') who were deemed to embody these notions. Yet how did Roy himself broach the intercultural issues of absorption and self-forgetting?

Although Roy was not at the forefront of an 'indigenized' or national academic practice, by the 1930s he had begun to accept fully its relevance to the study of India's 'tribal' populations. He elaborated this is an article that was pertinently entitled 'An Indian Outlook on Anthropology' (1938). He aimed to locate the 'ethnographic present,' which he articulated in relation to Munda modernity, within a confluence of temporal flows. These incorporated human evolution, social integration, environmental change, cultural development, and personal spirituality/morality. Extending universalist concepts informed by Vendanta philosophy, he apprehended embodiment or *Sharira* (lived human experience) as '… manifestations of different stages or aspects of human consciousness, [as] different material expressions of the individual 'Self' (*Jibatma*).' (1938: 147) He argued that cultural practices and social relationships – including those ascertained via anthropology – were wider externalizations of human consciousness and proposed that integrated *and* divergent histories of 'accumulated experience' should be interpreted within an overarching system of 'Indian' civilization or, more conspicuously, 'civilizational diversity' (1938: 148). Through his own 'experiments in holism' (see Bubandt and Otto 2010), which echoed contemporary philosophies of idealism, Roy set out the parameters for the recognition of the anthropological value of comparative studies. This was a broader field that contemporary interdisciplinary thinkers had introduced to India (Bhushan and Garfield 2011). Bubandt and Otto have since problematised holism as a series of mechanisms and concepts that reveal how 'phenomena have meaning, function, and relevance, only within a larger context, field of relations, or "world" …' (2010: 1). Roy's holism, however, re-integrated ethnography with cross-cultural comparison and subjective reflection to prompt further insights on the symbiosis of *desi* (non-elite) and *marga* (elite) cultures in India, on the meaning of symbiosis to anthropology in India, and on the concept of 'the visionary' (1938: 147-8).

All of these facets were seemingly relatable to the everyday and more monumental tensions between *dharma* (right living) and *adharma* (disorder). His exploration of the concept of the visionary is especially noteworthy, for in their unique contribution to culture and society such innovators could apparently reveal the moral significance of epochal changes. He singled out Birsa Munda as an exemplary personage, whose ability to embody collective memory *and* self-forgetting (via his spiritual/political authority) transformed social life in Chota Nagpur. Given his previous interpretations, this re-evaluation was breath-taking, yet perhaps not totally unpredictable. In the communion between Birsa and Roy, the latter made explicit a new correlation. This occurred in the process of identifying histories of individual and collective integration. These histories incorporated different registers of embodied time – such as ancestral memory, self-forgetting, autonomous futures – and were seen to equate with pre-modern Hindu scriptural practices. Just as these early scriptures literally archived 'such great personages … as incarnations, partial or complete, of the Deity' (1938: 148), Roy *re*-archived Birsa and the Birsaites within an 'Indian' anthropology to the extent that the correspondences between civilizational and insurgent pasts, as well as between national and 'tribal' futures, could signal the moral value of this utopian epistemology. That he re-archived a photographic portrait in the process suggests that his traversal of the lines connecting the public and the private, the past and the present, the inner and the outer, etc., were recoverable. Roy thereby assumed a moral conviction in shaping holistic interactions between regional personages and members of various local/non-local communities (including anthropologists). For Roy's contemporaries these interactions would have affirmed a sense of *dharma*, equilibrium, or unity (at individual and collective levels), that Sivaramakrishna Aiyar (1926: 182) defined as the 'vanishing' of space delimiting self and Other. Roy made his revelatory point explicit: 'The vital facts of human culture are facts of spiritual experience; and therefore the historian of culture must seek to identify … with the state of soul-evolution of the people he studies' (1938: 150).[5]

Where does this mystical outlook leave the anthropological historian interested in intercultural epistemology yet wary of hegemonic holisms (see Bubandt and Otto 2010: 6), such as the 'cosmic Universe' (Aiyar 1926: 185), 'Indian Civilization' (Vidyarthi 1977: 26), and nationhood, which activate more mundane yet no less integral notions like 'individual,' 'culture' and 'society'? My own emphasis on the notion of interdependence pertains to the field of *relational* philosophy that has developed, not only between Birsaite heritage and the intelligentsia in India, but also through a broader set of interactions between continental and Indian, as well as Humanist and anti-colonial, philosophies. It allows for a new kind of exploration of complex ethical and historical terrains of the nation (involving Chota Nagpur) that most modern philosophers and historians have taken as existing independently of anthropology, and of anthropological subjects and subject-positions. It is in close dialogue with early and innovative exponents of cultural heritage studies in post-colonial India, who have presented the case for anti-elitist models of cultural interpretation and transformation (see Malik 1976; Nandy 2003: xii). By defining new interpretive and representational frames, the democratic and ethical parameters of 'Indian' anthropology shaped new 'autonomous' archives and 'radical' archival processes (also see Malik 1976: 30; Souillac 2011). These parameters and archives did and do not exist in isolation. Indeed, they had both 'tribal' and scriptural antecedents in the pre-colonial and colonial past, thereby defining, in part, India's political and archival heritages and the ethical motivation to sustain these. And via their anthropological re-integration, they could and did assume contemporary intellectual and political resonance.

PART THREE

Intertwining conceptual strands

Birsa led a series of reformist and anti-colonial movements, notably the *Ulgulan* of 1898-1900, and is now known, by Mundas and non-Mundas alike, simply as *Birsa Bhagwan*, or Lord Birsa. His visual legacy sustains an awareness of temporalities that extend beyond the *Ulgulan* into a plethora of pasts and futures. In 1912, for example, Roy used the photographic portrait (Fig. 2) to elaborate an early chapter on the 'traditional history' of the Mundas, i.e. the mass migrations towards the Chota Nagpur region of Jharkhand in the pre-colonial era (Roy 1912: 27-60). It was not used to illustrate a subsequent chapter on the collective Munda experience of colonialism, through which Roy annotated Birsa's contribution to the religious, social and political history of Jharkhand (Roy 1912: 102-203). This was marked by dynamics of Hinduization, Christianization, inter-local landlordism, class-based tenancy struggles, and colonial governmentality. In using the image to invoke histories of Munda migration and assertions of Munda heritage, Roy opened up the temporal horizons of this subaltern figure. It became possible, and part of Roy's *dharmic* approach to historical anthropology, to read the figure in accordance with earlier/ancestral lives. Birsa's affinity with, and own strategic recollection of, Munda movements that preceded him, such as the 'Memorialist' and Sardar actions of the 1870s-80s (Roy 1912: 162), could thus also be apprehended through the portrait. On the surface, however, Birsa's visual predicament pointed to a period of captivity that rendered these other temporal horizons absent. Yet Roy re-archived these horizons carefully, to implicate himself, the image and the viewer into an unknown integrationist future, the uncertainties of which were magnified as the image became subject to revision and memory-work (see Fig. 1 and Fig. 3).

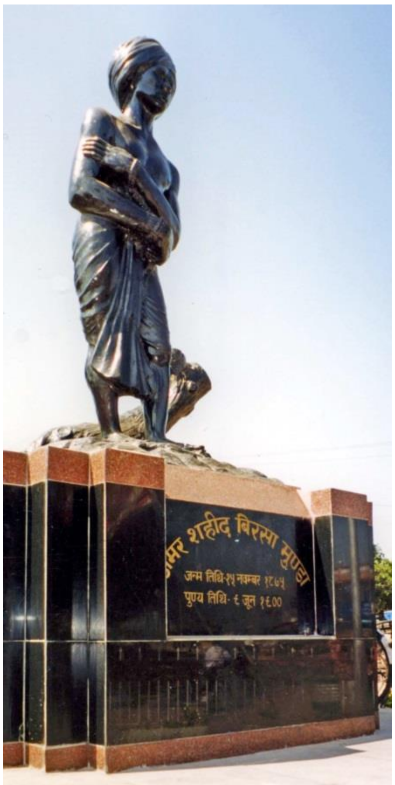

Fig 3. Birsa Munda memorial. Birsa Chowk, Khunti Road, Ranchi. Photograph © D. Rycroft 2000

Borrowed, in all probability, from a missionary archive in Chota Nagpur, after 1912 the image has be subject to significant re-scaling. From being one photograph amongst a very small group of *Ulgulan* scenes[6] it has become *the* iconic image. So how do viewers *after* Roy see Birsa: is it through the lens of the photographer, the space of the archivist, the mind of the anthropologist, the eye of the artist, the heart of the Birsaite, or the scope of the historian, or indeed anyone else? All of these possibilities carry with them their own ethical and temporal horizons. Most likely, viewers – like me and you – visually engage Birsa via a combination of their own terms and some of the above. In any scenario, a vexed temporal politics is at work as subaltern, civilizational, traditional, modern and other temporal dynamics are either made present (in some combination) or absent via the visual apprehension of the image. Such combinations allude to the efficacy of Birsa's afterlives. In his posthumous ability to criss-cross diverse realms of dis/embodiment, dis/order, and insurgent/civilizational time, Birsa rendered problematic – and productive – the central anthropological and civilizational notion of humanity, which thinkers such as Roy (1912: 325-6; 1938) and Coomaraswamy (1989) came to address variously. Could the re-construction of Birsa as representative of humanity (or humanity in India) rather than solely of 'the Mundas' help viewers engage abstract and ethical notions, such as human interdependence, that came to feature in India's modern anthropology and that were pre-figured by the Birsaites?

Inscribed in the *Sutratman* (doctrine of the thread-spirit), interdependence was characterized as the tension of a thread, which revealed itself via the ex-*tension* of the humans as they moved towards a realization of Humanity (Coomaraswamy 1989: 3-4), as 'self-consciousness' (Malhotra 1966: 67). This tension was deemed to allow for a certain kind of simultaneity, or a co-existence and co-presence, of the micro and the macro aspects of life-worlds, and of the confluence of the past and the future (Coomaraswamy 1989: 4). For Roy, a sense of holism extended to Birsa's legacy as it re-animated the interplay of human/divine realms and human/political times. Is this anthropological *dharma* (so to speak) best considered within the arena of academia or post-colonial cultural politics? Are these discrete arenas? What does the reversibility of Birsa-as-human and Birsa-as-divine say about our understanding of humanity and Adivasi history, or about the up-scaling of the *Ulgulan* in respect of Munda heritage? Is it valid to read the Birsa Memorial in Ranchi in terms of a utopian *swadeshi* intervention in India's 'racial' politics, or is it best understood in terms of the *Ulgulan* itself and the belated introduction of the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act? As noted, some important temporal dynamics reoccur as the history, memory and anthropology of the Birsaite movements continue to intersect with pre- and post-*Ulgulan* events. I contend, therefore, that what we are approaching as the Birsaite 'archive' should be assessed in terms of the (visual) manifestation of these intersections, rather than as a discrete or direct representation of the *Ulgulan* or of Birsa, its best known embodiment. These intersections point to the shifting parameters – of 'tradition', 'civilization' and 'diversity' (see Srivastava 1974) – through which collective belonging and national *dharmic* consciousness would be conceptualised and experienced as intercultural heritage, for example, before independence and at efficacious national sites, such as Maharathi's *pandal*.

'Chiasmic' time

This interplay between archival 'heritage' and 'autonomous' archives points to an analytical need to grasp the reversibility of Birsa, whose inter-archival afterlives have confirmed the cultural relevance both of his lived experience, as 'tribal,' subaltern, etc., and also of his national manifestation as a *dharmic* phenomenon embodying captivity *and* freedom, heroism *and* vulnerability, ancestral *and* social time. The portrait image is always both more and less than itself: its visuality transcends the photographic event, yet its prolonged temporality as an archival entity is always mediated at a human level. Its temporality, or the way it defines, occupies and animates particular aspects of time and temporal experience, is manifest at those diverse sites of reproduction, interlocution, use, and reception that have informed, and continue to inform it. At a surface level the sites correspond to the conditions of the image's initial emergence, i.e. Birsa's shifting political/religious identity and his constantly changing bodily form/visibility (Singh 1983: 67), which the anonymous photographer partially captured. Yet they also correspond to the anthropological interpretation of the philosophical system (of neo-Vedantism) that Roy employed to bring Birsaite and Adivasi heritage into the consciousness and time of the modern nation. Invoking the history of anthropological holism, Srivastava analyzed such flows in terms of *temporal depth* (1974: 23). So, the correspondences between these intertwining registers require consideration, and this is where the concept of chiasm becomes operative.

The concept of chiasm (pronounced kai-asm) has achieved some prominence in literary studies and in philosophy (Evans and Lawlor 2000). I have engaged the term via post-colonial philosophy, notably Homi Bhabha's concept of the 'temporality of continuance' (2001: 40). This characterizes the embodied and remembered aspects of revolution and revolutionary consciousness, which Bhabha poetically annotated as 'chiasmic' time (2001: 39-40). Even though 'chiasmic' time is not yet a prominent concept in the field of post-colonial studies, the chiasm has helped some key thinkers in their understanding of the potential intersections of different and competing notions/experiences of temporality (see Rycroft 2013: 234-7). In literary studies, the chiasm is referred to primarily through 'chiastic' literary devices that in and of themselves have become relevant to the workings of theological and other texts, and to the possibilities of intercultural 'translatability' (Budick and Iser 1996). In continental and post-colonial philosophy, the chiasm concept has gained prominence via Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Merleau-Ponty was a leftist phenomenologist who theorized the chiasm as an integral part of the 'relation of reversibility' (see Dillon 1983; Evans and Lawlor 2000: 10; Rycroft 2013: 236-7), definable as 'that which binds us to one another, something important both to ethics and politics, and that which liberates ethics and politics from … an ontology of full presence' (Johnson 2008: 169; also see Thrift 2001: 3). As explored in his celebrated and posthumous work on *Le Visible et l'Invisible* (1964), for Merleau-Ponty, the chiasm could explicate how humans actually experienced the differing yet conjoined dynamics of sensory and social experience. Through these 'inter-worlds,' humans could perceive their own individual and collective relation to other senses and other life-worlds, as well as the correspondence between each. This is a process that has a bearing on how political ontology and embodiment relate, in terms of the imperfect possibilities of mutuality and reciprocity (see Johnson 2008: 177; Low 1996; Rycroft 2013: 238-42) that, as I have explored above, infiltrate the after-lives of Birsa Munda.

Sanford Budick (1996: 225) has usefully annotated the duplex and multiplex aspects of the chiasm and chiasmic or, in his literary terms, chiastic thinking that he contends can become a pivotal process in intercultural interpretation. The tenor of the different adjectives that stem from the concept, namely 'chiastic' (or chiasmatic) and 'chiasmic,' correspond closely. In my analysis, however, the emphasis is not so much on textual 'chiastic' devices that allow for both repetition and reversal as, for example, A:B through B:A or A:B:C through C:B:A (see Budick 1996: 227-9). Rather the emphasis is on the metaphorical and theoretical potential of the chiasm to grasp the reversibility of the archive (and archival processes) vis-à-vis 'Indian' anthropology. The analysis focuses on Birsa's image, because such kinds of reversibility were integral to the dynamics of the Birsaite heritage that Roy and Maharathi, for example, re-animated in the 1930s to activate and extend ideas of unity and community. That these ideas prompted the coalescing of (a) different times, such as the insurgent, the pre-insurgent, or the post-insurgent, (b) different durations, such as the life of Birsa, the life of the photograph, and the life of the anthropologist, and (c) different temporal mechanisms, as pertaining to embodied, photographic, and archival worlds, suggests that they merit reflection in ways that allude to 'chiasmic' time. The chiasmic aspects characterize '… a potentiality that is brought into being only as it acts or exists in the interstices of interaction' (Thrift 2001: 15). In the pre-independence era, I contend that such interstices of interaction were activated as the pathways towards different kinds of *temporal* experience, understanding or consciousness. This was because such pathways allowed for multiple directionality, prolonged or momentary journey times, as well as a deeper apprehension of the shifting relations between self and world.

The imagery and history under consideration may be assessed as a multiplex configuration, in which the mutuality of a Birsaite 'archive' and 'Indian' anthropology becomes graspable. The notion of mutuality covers their mutual translatability and their mutual resonance (see Blouin and Rosenberg 2006: 1). In using the term 'multiplex' I mean to extend the duplex configuration of the chiasm. Conventionally speaking, the *chiasmus* pertains to the correspondence and movement between two complementary notions, such as the inner *and* the outer, the frontal *and* the reversal, the vertical *and* the horizontal, etc., as these become part of people's experience, knowledge and representation of their life-worlds. Chiasmic thinking registers the simultaneity of the inner vis-à-vis the outer, and *vice versa*, for example, in terms of their reversibility. Any strict sense of dichotomy or symmetry is lost, or at least temporarily forgotten, thereby re-rendering the notions, and their complementarity, meaningful in new and unpredictable ways (see Budick 1996: 227). Following Budick (1996: 230), I address the concept of *chiasmus* through its inter-connection with other *chiasma*, and the multiplicity that extends via artistic invocations of *chiasma* as inter-subjective. These invocations include relational and anthropological registers of, for example, the personal *and* the collective, the part *and* the whole, and the absent/future *and* the present/past, as well as their realisation and activation via 'intensive' and other forms of archival remembering.

For Budick, chiasmic thinking creates a register of absence pertaining to the fixity of those dichotomies that are left behind as experiences of reciprocity and reversal hold sway: 'The experience of any chiasmus with regard to its … absences … is [an experience] of movements of turning and counter-turning' (1989: 229). Registers of absence are similarly engaged and dis-engaged via Birsaite visual and archival cultures that de-binarize or 'counter-turn' the past *and* the present, and the past *and* the future, etc., to make present (in time) new temporal horizons, which would be envisioned and experienced at once. These transformations acquire some legibility in (and as) the interstitial moments suggested by the idea of 'chiasmic' time. This 'new' present can be remembered, re-presented, re-articulated and re-integrated. Such chiasmic memory is enmeshed within complex temporal dynamics incorporating self-forgetting and future-as-presence. Within the idea of 'chiasmic' time, the inverse of memory is not forgetting. Rather, given the mutual reversibility of collective memory and self-forgetting, 'chiasmic' time renders absent and illegible any binary formations, for example of past vs. present, memory vs. forgetting, or self vs. Other. It is thus revolutionary *and* reconciliatory (non-oppositional) to the extent that, as a modern 'Indian' temporality, it would provide '… the horizon and context in which [multiple truths and values] were deemed to be coexisting, reconcilable and accessible to "comparative" and harmonizing studies … by universalizing traditional … schemes of "concordance" (*samanvaya*)' (Halbfass 1985: 13). It renders utopian the unpredictable and autonomous qualities of 'autonomous' archives (Moore and Pell 2010: 255-7). The intertwining of the Birsaite movements' political legacies with related archival/national cultures and anthropological attempts to harness a contemporary experience of these as interdependent, generated diverse temporal experiences: as embodied, inter-subjective, historical, utopian, ancestral, secular and spiritual.

Concluding remarks

Roy's publication of the archival portrait and his later *dharmic* reinterpretation of Birsaism sustained temporal horizons of coexistence. Rather than necessarily marking a period *after* Birsa these dynamics inaugurated a time *with* Birsa, in such a way that a sense of affiliation could become manifest between Birsaites and non-Birsaites. The mutuality of the movements and the imagery came about in and amongst an on-going struggle for land rights and forest rights, and political/cultural autonomy, which was embodied by Birsa *and* his political forebears. It was re-embodied in different ways by subsequent interlocutors to the extent that a collectivization via shared 'archival' experiences (of embodiment and re-embodiment) could occur. The temporal boundaries that have shaped the presence of Birsa in the historical record usually dwell on the *Ulgulan*, on Birsa's captivity and on his death. This means that Birsaism and its history are inevitably defined by the historian's self-location *after* Birsa, and by an agenda to render the movement historical, rather than sharing inter-temporal locations, which would inevitably entail some levels of self-forgetting and self-transformation (especially amongst non-tribals). Roy undoubtedly contributed to this sense of historicity, whilst also setting the stage for his *dharmic* exegesis. But through his archival and visual work he set out possibilities for readers to acknowledge a more coeval proximity to the Birsaite or 'archival' heritage, through which notions of 'civilizational diversity' could be remembered *and* forgotten, or lost *and* recovered, according to the absorbing contingencies of the present. These possibilities engaged the shifting relationship between 'tribal' pasts and national futures, and enabled radical archival and visual thinking to coexist.

'Chiasmic' time annotates the interaction between various kinds of time or temporality, in such a way that their convergence and divergence, and their mutuality and non-mutuality, become conspicuous and graspable. How, for example, could Munda history and political heritage translate into national as well as 'tribal' futures? Roy's work attends to this probing question thereby becoming part of the anthropological/cultural realities under consideration. The interactivity inherent in the concept of 'chiasmic' time also prompts an exploration into the *reversibility* of any or all of those temporalities that were or are involved. In the context of 1912, Roy began this process of reversal by re-using the Birsa portrait to bear witness to the historical injustices inherent in conventional or dominant non-Kolarian views of India's 'tribal' peoples, rather than to embellish a history of the *Ulgulan per se*. In other words, it came to speak to and of a different kind of political temporality, which was associated with (but not overtly defined by) the *Ulgulan*. If, as anthropological historians, we are able to engage the significance of these kinds of reversals, the wider point about the re-alignments of insurgent lives and anthropological/utopian embodimentation before independence becomes pronounced. This raises many questions concerning how insurgents, photographs, historical anthropologists (such as Roy), and anthropological historians convey temporal notions and, of course, the intersections of these notions. In re-thinking the relation between Birsa

Munda and 'Indian' anthropology, the concept of chiasm engages archival 'heritage' as private *and* public, closed *and* open, subjective *and* objective, in such a way that moments of coexistence and reversal activate the archive as autonomous. Perhaps it was such kinds of autonomy that Maharathi envisaged, as he aligned his vision of Birsa with the Congress party's aspirations for a new heritage-conscious political engagement in the region. Moving on from this intervention, and in developing an understanding of Birsa's legacy as an 'autonomous' and national (rather than an un-used or colonial) archive, Birsaism may apprehended afresh by anthropologists and historians.

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Notes

[1] All page references (except for the photograph) pertaining to Roy's monograph (1912) relate to the republished version (1970). The same goes for Singh (1966; 1983) as a means of facilitating the reading, unless otherwise indicated.

[2] As I've discussed previously (Rycroft 2004: 62), Birsa's portrait was included in Christopher Bayley's exhibition entitled *The Raj* at the National Portrait Gallery, London, in 1990. The image was borrowed from the Nehru Memorial Museum and Library, having entered that collection from the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti. The catalogue for *The Raj* exhibition cites the image as a copy-print of a photograph. Close inspection reveals that the image is more likely a copy of Maharathi's portrait than of the photograph published by Roy, given Birsa's new faciality and the accentuation of the prominent shadow under the beard/chin. This suggests that Maharathi's portrait could also have been a part of, or once related to, the Gandhi Smriti and Darshan Samiti. Maharathi's portrait, now housed at Patna Museum, or the copy-print could well have been seen, used or owned by Gandhi an associate. An additional note to readers of my early article (2004): I have become sceptical of my own interpretation of Rev. Lusty's role in the production of the photograph. I now think that it was taken at the time of Birsa's first trial (that was later abandoned) at Khunti, rather than at the time of his first arrest and hope to develop this proposition further in another article.

[3] The term Birsaite denotes followers of Birsa and Birsaism. Its phraseology corresponds with Vaishnavite (or devotees of Vishnu) and Saivite (or adherents of Saivism).

[4] These are too numerous to mention. It suffices to say that they largely correspond with the format of the chapters included in the monograph.

[5] Coomaraswamy (1989: 5) also alluded to it in his claim that 'the pattern of all other societies and [the pattern] of a true civilization' were contained within humans as community actors or citizens.

[6] There is little correlation between the visual make-up of Roy's series in the *Modern Review* and the visual aspects of his monograph (1912). There is much more consistency in terms of the earlier and later versions of the written texts. The causes, impacts and effects of these visual discrepancies

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require further research. Interestingly both the *Ulgulan* and non-*Ulgulan* images seem to have been borrowed from missionary archives. In the series and the monograph Roy credits Rev. Whitley and Peter Kumar as lenders/sources of various photographs, but the origin of the portrait of Birsa (shown here in Fig. 2) is not acknowledged or credited anywhere.

ARTICLE

THE POLITICS OF ETHNICITY AMONGST THE LIMBU IN SIKKIM: LITERARY DEVELOPMENT, RELIGIOUS REFORMS AND THE MAKING OF THE COMMUNITY

BY MÉLANIE VANDENHELSKEN

Abstract: This paper sets the political context for the changes in Limbu cultural practices in Sikkim from the last century until today. It first discusses the Limbu's relations with the Sikkim state, highlighting that these were assigned simultaneously to two opposed categories—having been perceived as one of the pillars of the newly founded Sikkimese kingdom in the 17th century, in recent times they were eventually moved to the category of 'foreigners'—which reflected the division of the group by the establishment of the Nepal–Sikkim border. The political changes that followed the fall of the Sikkimese kingdom and the 1975 integration of Sikkim into the Indian Union as a distinct state created the conditions for the emergence of assertions of Limbu identity; this entailed distancing themselves from 'Nepaliness.' From the late 1980s, in relation to state policy, Limbu activism's main emphasis moved from literature and script to rituals and religion, whose site of practice was consequently shifted from the house and the village to community temples and the ethnic community.

Keywords: Limbu, Sikkim, Kiranti, literary development, rituals, identity assertion, state categorizations

Introduction

This paper focuses on cultural dynamics amongst the Limbu (or Yakthungba) in Sikkim by discussing the main Limbu identity movements prevalent over the past century. The Limbu are one of the ethnic groups recently recognized as a Scheduled Tribe (ST) in India (in 2003). Unlike the other ethnic groups still considered as 'Nepalese' in Sikkim, the Limbu claim indigeneity in Sikkim. Their identity movements in Sikkim carry the mark of this double belonging, which entails simultaneously taking part in struggles fought on the other side of the border, while striving to construct a unified ethnic identity as part of claims anchored within national territories. This paper discusses the part played by the Sikkimese Limbu in the trans-border Kiranti movement in the early twentieth century—mainly focused on literary development—and describes the path that has led their ethnic leaders to place rituals and cultural unity at the core of their activities. By doing so, it firstly highlights the malleability of ascribed categorization, including that of 'indigenous.' It secondly highlights forms of articulation between the administrative category of Scheduled Tribe, and the ethnographic classifications it entails, with indigenous views of ethnic 'identity,' illustrating the ways ethnic groups appropriate and adapt categories from above to make the community both a space of belonging and a means to access political rights. I also highlight the role of politics in religious change among Limbu in Sikkim and show how it influences the choice of religious aspects representing 'Limbu-ness.[1]'

The Limbu and the state in Sikkim's early history

The main Limbu settlement stretches along both sides of the border between eastern Nepal and Sikkim. The Limbu number about 300,000 in Nepal (Nepal National Population Census 1991, Central Bureau of Statistics 1993), residing mainly in the easternmost part of the country; they are 56,560 in Sikkim, accounting for 9.74% of the total population, and make up the fourth largest community of the State (Department of Economics, Statistics, Monitoring and Evaluation, *Sikkim state census* 2006: 60). Together with the Rai they form the major part of the Kiranti,[2] who are considered to be the 'oldest' settlers in the area.[3] They speak a language of the Tibeto-Burman family.

Among the twenty 'communities' enumerated by the Sikkim government (Sikkim State Census 2006: 2),[4] the Limbu are one of the four groups recognized in the state as Scheduled Tribes, alongside the Bhutia, Lepcha (recognized in 1978) and Tamang (2003). Scheduled Tribes in Sikkim account for 37.39% of the total population (Sikkim State Census 2006: 50). Since the British colonization of Sikkim at the end of the nineteenth century, the Sikkim population has been divided into two groups, the 'Sikkimese' and the 'Nepalese,' emphasizing the local ruling elite's view of the latter as foreigners in opposition to its own indigeneity (Vandenhelsken 2011).[5] This division formed the main basis of organization of political groups, in particular in the political struggle that led to the fall of the monarchy and to the integration of Sikkim as a state in the Indian Union in 1975. As we shall see in more detail below, the Limbu were considered as 'Nepalese,' even while a division was simultaneously maintained between 'indigenous' and 'foreign' Limbu. This political context largely determined their strategies for identity assertion. The implementation of the recommendations of the Mandal Commission in the 1990s for the first time created the conditions for the assertion of a collective identity specific to the ethnic group, and detached from 'Nepalese' identity. I now further develop these points and discuss the ways the Limbu articulated their identity claims in these various contexts.

The Limbu today claim to be indigenous to Sikkim (T.B. Subba 1999: 34–37; see also Arora 2007) mainly on the grounds of their participation in the foundation of the Bhutia kingdom in the seventeenth century. This is attested by the treaty known as the *Lho Mon Tsong sum* Agreement, signed in 1663 by representatives of Bhutia, Lepcha and Limbu to recognize a single structure of authority headed by the Bhutia king, and their subordination to it (Mullard 2012: 140).[6] The treaty also circumscribed the territory of the kingdom, which very likely included—although no written sources confirm it—at least parts of the Limbu Territory or 'Limbuan' (including current Northern Panchthar and Ilam according to Chemjong 2003: 162). This connection to Limbuan was later secured by the marriage between the second Sikkimese King Tensung Namgyal (1670–1700) and the daughter of the Limbu chief Yong-Yong Hang, simultaneous with the marriages of several other Limbu women to Bhutia ministers (Thutob Namgyal 1908: 24).

Nevertheless, the Sikkim kingdom remained unstable. Mullard (2012) highlights various internal conflicts between factions competing for power in Sikkim as well as tribal conflicts in the first part of the eighteenth century. The conceptions of ethnicity prevalent at the time can inform us about relations between these groups: Limbu and Lepcha were both labelled '*Mon*' by the Bhutia (Mullard 2012: 86, fn 49). In Tibetan, the term '*Mon*' refers to people settled in the southern Tibetan areas and Bhutan and has the derogatory meaning of 'barbarians' (Pommaret 1999: 52–53). The use of '*Mon*' for both Lepcha and Limbu suggests that the Bhutia gave them equal status; this status was perceived as inferior to Bhutia noble clans, as shown by the establishment of a special monastery for Lepcha, Limbu and Bhutia of low rank—Sangacholing in West Sikkim—in the vicinity of the royal priests' monastery of Pemayangtse, reserved for the Bhutia nobility (Vandenhelsken 2009).

Following a conflict between Limbu forced into labour and Bhutia leaders in the early 18th century, Limbuan was separated from Sikkim (Thutob Namgyal 1908: 35; Pradhan 2009: 80). Political relations and conflicts were both pursued, however (Thutob Namgyal 1908: 42). Connections between Sikkim and present-day northeast Nepal were maintained as late as 1850, when Hooker noted that the people of "Wallanchoon"—actually, Walangchung Gola in the Limbu area at the Nepal–Tibet border (Pradhan 2009: 79)—paid 'taxes to the Nepal and Sikkim Rajahs' (Hooker 1854, vol. 1: 215).

Based on Limbu and Lepcha manuscripts from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries collected by the British diplomat Brian Houghton Hodgson, Dhunghel argues that Sikkim, like Bhutan, at that time adopted a policy of suppression of indigenous practices (i.e. Limbu and Lepcha), aiming at replacing them with those of Tibetan Buddhism (2006: 53; J.R. Subba 1999: 247). This provides an explanatory frame for the murder of Srijanga—1704–1741 according to Chemjong 2003—by Sikkimese Buddhist lamas (Sprigg 1959: 591; Gazetteer of Sikkim 1989: 37; JR Subba 1999: 243; van Driem 2001: 674–675; Chemjong 2003; Dhungel 2006; Pradhan 2009: 58; Gaenszle 2011 and 2013). Srijanga is believed to have 'rediscovered' the old *Chong* script (supposedly dating from the 9th century), and developed a new Kiranti alphabet, today known as Sirijanga (Dhungel 2006: 54). He spread the idea of a Limbu cultural specificity, and was murdered 'from fear of the Limbu, now becoming a united and separate people' (Gazetteer of Sikhim 1989: 37). This suggests that already in eighteenth-century Sikkim, a script was perceived as the foundation of unity of a culture (Schlemmer 2003/2004: 134).

In the aftermath of Pritvhi Narayan Shah's conquest of Nepal at the end of the eighteenth century, the areas roughly comprising present-day Limbuan were consolidated into Nepal (Davids and van Drien 1985: 118; Pradhan 2009: 130–140; T.B. Subba 1999: 36–37). This brought different tribes of 'Mongoloid' and Tibetan origins under the control of the new kingdom of Nepal (Pradhan 2009: 140). The Limbu became 'transborder peoples' (Weiner 1985): the political border no longer coincided with the ethno-cultural divide.

Limbu, indigenous and foreigners in Sikkim

At the end of the 19th century, all Limbu were moved from the status of one of the 'three races living in Sikkim' (the *Lho Mon Tsong sum*; Thutob Namgyal and Yeshe Dolma 1908: 23, section 'Pedigree of Sikkim Kazis') into the category of 'Nepalese immigrants' (Strawn 1994: 25–26). This move, as well as the enduring stigmatisation of Nepali as foreigners in Sikkim, reflected inter alia the British colonial administration's imposition upon the Sikkim ruling elite of the mass settlement of Nepali in Sikkim—this policy bearing similarities to the one implemented in Assam in the early nineteenth century (Weiner 1978).[7] It also reflected colonial categorizations which divided the Sikkim population into 'more or less allied' (Limbu, Gurung, Murmi, Khambu, Mangar), 'later immigrants from beyond the Arun [river] in Nepal,' and Bhutia and Lepcha (*Gazetteer of Sikhim* 1894: 27). This pattern was also simplified into the one of 'Lepcha, Bhutia, and Nepalese' (*Gazetteer of Sikhim:* 1894: 259), which is commonly used today in Sikkim—in particular in tourist brochures—to describe the population of the state. The division of the Sikkim population into 'Sikkimese' (i.e. Bhutia and Lepcha, to which the ruling elite belonged) and 'Nepalese' (all the other groups) was institutionalized between 1950 and 1979 through the reservation of seats for each category in the Royal council (eventually renamed 'legislative assembly').[8]

However, the division of the population of Sikkim into 'Sikkimese' and 'Nepalese' did not replace but in fact co-existed with other forms of categorization. Notably, a distinction between indigenous and foreign Limbu remained in common people's discourses and practices, as well as at political level (see Grover 1974: 56-57). This distinction is 'naturalized' by reference to two descent groups amongst the Limbu—'Lhasa Gotra,' presumably originally from Tibet, and 'Kashi gotra,' from Benares—an expression of which is also found in colonial literature (*Gazetteer of Sikhim* 1894: 27). Limbu indigenous to Sikkim—called 'Tsong' in Sikkimese Tibetan, and also considered as Buddhist (Sinha 1975: 31)[9]—are assimilated to the former, while 'Nepalese' and 'Hindu' Limbu would belong to the 'Kashi gotra.'[10]

Until the 1960s, all Limbu were subject to the same unequal rules as other Nepalese—unequal to that of Lepcha and Bhutia—in regard to land and citizenship rights; notably, they paid taxes as Nepalese (Grover 1974: 56). From the 1960s, the Sikkim kingdom implemented several changes differentiating 'Tsong' from other Limbu on the grounds of the indigeneity of the former. In 1967, a seat reserved to 'Tsong' was added to the Sikkim State council. The then king of Sikkim Palden Thondup Namgyal supported the view that 'the Tsongs were not Nepalese although they had so far been 'lumped' with the Nepalese. They are a distinct identity in themselves and as such have now been given a separate seat' (*National Herald*, n. 81 quoted by Grover 1974: 56–57). This view is also to be connected to the king's endeavour from the 1960s to 'invent' Sikkim national identity, which involved bringing out a 'Mongoloid stock' from 'ethnically Nepali' and bringing together the 'Mongoloid Tribes' and the Bhutia-Lepcha in order to withstand Indian hegemony, supported by the Nepalese of Sikkim (Hiltz 2003: 73–75); and this at a time when the 'Nepalese's' opposition to the ruling elite, demanding more democracy in the state, had gained much strength. In 1968, the king organized the teaching of Limbu language in schools and Limbu language teachers were appointed (J.R. Subba 1999: 247). In 1971, a five-member Committee was formed chaired by the queen to prepare Limbu text books (*ibid*.). However, disagreements occurred between the committee members and the palace over the name to be given to the language and to the script, which hints at the Sikkimese Limbu indigenists' endeavours towards the cultural unification of the transnational Limbu community: while the palace wanted the name 'Tsong language,' the Limbu preferred 'Limboo language' and 'Srijonga script'(*ibid*.).

In this context, the Limbu—more precisely 'Tsong'—political leaders claimed that on religious grounds, their group had more affinity to Bhutia and Lepcha than to the Nepalese (Jha and Mishra 1984: 33). However, the mention of the Tsong in the Sikkim Subject Regulation of 1961 and the inclusion of a Tsong seat in the Council in 1967 were considered part of a ruling elite's project to reduce the political effectiveness of the majority Nepali community (Sinha 1975: 31; Grover 1974: 56 and 121). In 1973, Sikkimese Nepalese rose up against the lack of democracy in the kingdom, which led to the integration of Sikkim into India in 1975. The 8 May 1973 agreement, which followed the largest uprising in the kingdom, specifically mentioned that the Sikkimese of Nepali origins included the Tsong (Moktan 2004: 53–55). This was contested by Nepalese leaders and no Tsong seat was finally included in the newly constituted assembly one year later; there was instead an equal number of seats for the Bhutia-Lepcha and for the Nepalese (Jha and Mishra 1984: 84–85).

'Merger'[11] and the beginning of Limbu activism in Sikkim

Whereas the rhetoric of the Kiranti movement launched in North Bengal and Nepal in the early twentieth century largely expressed their opposition to and difference from 'high castes' or 'Thagadaris' (see, for example, T.B. Subba 1999), the Sikkimese Limbu political claims were determined by the context of the ruling class's domination, which created the conditions of their assimilation to 'Nepalese' to maintain political unity. The need for political unity very likely[12] prevented them asserting their cultural distinctiveness from Nepali culture as well, whereas the Kiranti political struggle entailed fighting 'Aryan [Hindu] domination' through constructing a unifying narrative for all Kiranti based on a common history and culture (Gaenszle 2002 and 2013; Schlemmer 2009). This movement laid emphasis on the promotion and development of the Srijanga script. The first Kiranti organization, the Sarva Kiranti Chumlung, was founded in Kalimpong in 1925 to propagate cultural awareness amongst the Limbu and develop their language (T.B. Subba 1999: 113). A major figure of this movement is the scholar and early promoter of the '*Srijanga*' script Iman Singh Chemjong (1904–1975).[13]

Little is known about the participation of the Sikkim Limbu in the Kiranti movement, which possibly reflects either the state of infancy of the research on the Sikkim Limbu, or the impossibility for the Sikkim Limbu to assert cultural specificities due to the political context in Sikkim. According to secondary sources, Lalsor Sendang, founder of the Sarva Kiranti Chumlung in Kalimpong, stayed in west Sikkim after having fled Nepal, and taught people about the life and work of Srijanga, but this teaching had little effect due to people's illiteracy (J.R. Subba 1999: 238).

The integration of Sikkim into India provided the conditions for the emergence of Limbu activism, further highlighting the dependence of cultural dynamics on political categorizations and alliances in Sikkim: the first Kiranti association in Sikkim, the Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limbu (Tsong) Chumlung, was founded in Tharpu (West Sikkim) in May 1973 (T.B. Subba 1999: 114), a couple of weeks after the 8 May agreement from which mention of a Tsong seat had been stripped. One of the resolutions passed in the first general meeting of the association was that the 'Chong' (Tsong) were not 'Nepali' but one of the indigenous tribes of Sikkim (*ibid*.). The activities of the association focused on the demand for ST status, restoration of the Limbu seat in the Sikkim Legislative Assembly, and promotion of Limbu culture and identity (*ibid*.).

From the beginning and until today, Sikkimese Limbu activism has focused on the interconnected goals of getting a share of state benefits, in particular access to participation in power, and the composition of a distinct Limbu cultural 'identity,' believed to have almost disappeared in the course of recent history due to political domination. ST status is viewed as instrumental in this context, and its claim entails getting state recognition of distinct ethnic cultural practices (Middleton and Shneiderman 2008). From the late 1970s, Limbu activism mainly focused on the development of Limbu literature and script, together with claiming Scheduled Tribe status, reservation of seats for the Limbu in the legislative assembly, and official recognition of Limbu language (K.B. Limboo 2003).[14] The Limbu applied for Scheduled Tribe Status from 1976 (*op. cit.:* 34), and this demand was explicitly opposed by the Chief Minister N.B. Bhandari in 1990 on the grounds of preventing the political division of the 'Nepalese' (T.B. Subba 1999: 115). State support for Limbu activism then mainly focused on the development of the Limbu language.

Early Limbu activism as development of language and literature

From the 1970s to the 1990s, Limbu activists worked on the organization of teaching Limbu language in government schools, whereas Limbu was little spoken in Sikkim; Nepali is the main language for all groups in Sikkim, as 'ethnic languages' are less spoken than in Nepal. In 2001, 6.3% speakers of the Limbu language were counted in Sikkim (Census of India 2001), 0.7% higher than in 1981.[15] As Turin has shown (2011), affirming an ethnic language as a mother tongue is also a means to assert ethnic belonging in Sikkim. It does not necessarily imply that the language is used in daily life. However, a number of Sikkim Limbu do write and speak in Limbu, and the development of Limbu language teaching in government schools through the preparation of textbooks and the training of teachers enabled its instruction to a large number of students: in 1998, the Limbu language was taught in 77 schools, and around 4,000 students were studying the language (J.R. Subba 1999: 253). By the end of the 1990s, Sikkim included 267 Limbu teachers (all levels included) and in 2000, textbooks were finalized for all classes until college level (*ibid*.).

In 1981, the Limbu language was declared a state language, together with Nepali, Lepcha and Bhutia. A weekly radio program in Limbu was introduced in 1983 on All India Radio. Literary journals in Limbu were also published, such as the Tumtumdo Hena, which came out between 1973 and 1981 (B.B. Subba 2003: 52–53). Among Limbu intellectuals—mostly government employees—B.B. Subba (joint director, Education Department of the Government of Sikkim) is a particularly prominent figure. He published around thirty books in Limbu between 1976 and 1984, including textbooks, Limbu grammars and dictionaries (translated into Hindi, Nepali and English) as well as novels (*ibid*.). This work was supported by the creation of a Limbu Language section in the Education department of the Sikkim government. The Sikkimese Limbu also worked on the codification and standardization of the Srijanga script and Limbu language; this endeavour led more particularly to the establishment of a Limbu printing press in 1983, Subba Prakashan Press (in Gangtok), using typeface designed in Sikkim by B.B. Subba. Before this date, Limbu books were handwritten and B.B. Subba's books were partly published by the Nagaland Basha Parisha in Kohima. This typeface was later used to design a font for computers.

Thus, unlike in Nepal, Limbu activism focused on the ethnic group, rather than on larger ethnic categories such as that of the Kiranti and Nepalese, despite walking in the footsteps of the Kiranti movement's founding fathers by understanding ethnic activism primarily as support for literary and literacy development. The Kiranti movement in Nepal gathered together several groups on cultural and historical grounds, and this alliance was perceived as a means to oppose Hindu domination (Gaenszle 2000 amongst others, Schlemmer 2003/2004, Hangen 2010). In Sikkim, ethnic cultural differentiation and specificity, which the demand for ST status in particular entails, bear an increasing promise of social, political and economic empowerment over time (Vandenhelsken 2016). Notably, the Rai and the Limbu, who recomposed and highlighted their common history and cultural practices in Nepal, each developed their own scripts in Sikkim. Rai schoolbooks are now printed in Sikkim, distinct from the Limbu ones (Gaenszle 2011: 291).[16]

The focus of activism on narrow ethnic entities is, however, not only a recent phenomenon in Sikkim. The movement, supported by the foundation of the All Kirata association in 1925, was first mainly upheld by the Limbu (T.B. Subba 1999: 112–123). The focus of the activities of cultural associations on ethnic groups continued after Merger when new Kiranti associations arose which concerned specific ethnic groups in particular, such as the Akhil Sikkim Kirat Limbu (1981), the Akhil Kirant Rai Sangh (1990), and the Akhil Kirat Dewan (Yakha) Sangh (2005).

The religious turn: community rituals, and the ritualization of the community

From the late 1980s, a pro-tribal movement gained strength in the entire eastern Himalayan region, largely nourished by the rising opposition to the Panchayat system in Nepal, which led to the adoption of parliamentary democracy in 1990 and to the movement of 'indigenous nationalities' (Np. *Janajati*) (see Gellner Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton 1997; Gellner 2007). The struggle for democracy was articulated in terms of the fight of 'tribes' (*janajati*) against Hindu domination, and, for several ethnic groups such as the Gurung, entailed rejecting Hinduism or 'becoming not-Hindu' (Hangen 2010). In Sikkim, the pro-tribal movement rose up in opposition to the then Chief Minister, N.B. Bhandari, who had opposed the implementation of the recommendation of the Mandal Commission with the intention to safeguard the unity of the 'Nepalese' (Sikkim Herald 1990). The election of P.K. Chamling as Chief Minister in 1994 succeeded in bringing to power the first government representing tribal people in centuries. The new government launched a politics of state recognition of ethnic cultural specificities in support of the recognition of all Sikkim ethnic groups as Scheduled Tribes by the central Indian government.[17] In 1995, the Newar, Rai, Gurung, Magar, Sherpa, and Tamang were added to the list of State official languages (the state official newspaper, *Sikkim Herald*, is now published in all the official languages of the state). The policy also entailed recognition of distinctive collective cultural practices, in particular community rituals. As regards the Limbu, Sirijungha's birth anniversary was recognized as a state holiday in 1997 under the name of Teyongshi Sirijunga Singthebe Tongnam and has become an occasion of community religious celebration (J.R. Subba 2008: 218).

From the 1990s, Limbu ethnic activists clarified their view of cultural unity, whose contours were drawn for example in the context of the 2011 census. On this occasion, the Sukhim Yakthung Sapshok Sangjumpo, the apex body of the Limbu of Sikkim, circulated guidelines amongst Sikkimese Limbu explaining how questions in the census should be answered: 'Limboo' should be spelled with the 'double-O' instead of 'Limbu.' Those who write 'Subba' as their surname were requested to include 'Limboo' in brackets to reiterate their belonging to the community, and all Limboos were called upon to record 'Limboo' as their mother tongue. They should also record 'Yuma' as their religion (Sikkim Now! 2010). The foundation of associations largely supported the group's cultural endeavour. Between 1979 and 2007, more than twenty Limbu and/or Kiranti associations were founded in Sikkim. From the early 1980s these associations combined literary and religious activities, and from the 1990s Limbu associations started to be founded which had only a religious purpose. These associations were devoted to the maintenance of the newly built Limbu Temple, Mang Heem or Mangkhim, following the building of the first of them in Mangshila in North Sikkim in 1993. Sikkim today counts around fifteen Manghim in the four districts.

The attempt to constitute a unified and revised 'Limbu religion' materialised in a recomposed religious practice called 'Yumaism.'[18] In his study of the Limbu in eastern Nepal in the 1970s, Sagant describes Yuma, the grandmother—she is an ancestor and the worldly form of the creator of the universe—as one of the major Limbu divinities, guardian of the house and the body. Each household made offerings to her twice a year (Sagant 1969, 1981, 2016). Yumaism is the form given in Sikkim to the movement known as Satyahangma (C. Subba 1995: 87) developed by the ascetic Phalgunanda Lingden (1885–1949), from Panchthar in East Nepal, who propagated its use as a symbol of a reformed Kiranti religion in opposition to the Rana regime (1846–1951).[19] This reform, started by Phalgunanda and which regained strength from the 1990s, can be interpreted as a 'Sanskritization' of the religious practices (Gaenszle 2011: 290); it entailed not merely 'to rid Kirant religion from its 'bad' cultural aspects and from external influences in order to find again its original purity', but also to 'revise' religion (Schlemmer 2003/2004: 132).

In Sikkim, Yumaism includes a specific 'teaching' called Yuma Samyo (J.R. Subba 2008: 306 and 309–310). The Limbu writer J.R. Subba's work was instrumental in providing a philosophical basis to this religious practice; in particular, in his book *Yumaism, the Limboo Way of Life. A Philosophical Analysis* (2012), he explicitly provides Yumaism with a philosophical base borrowing ideas from Christianity and Hinduism, in line with Phalgunanda's Satyahangma religious reforms.

In giving shape to Yumaism, Srijanga's life has been reinterpreted, his religious features having been brought to light in addition to his literary achievements. He is depicted as the founding father of Yumaism that he came to propagate in Sikkim, accompanied by eight disciples (J.R. Subba 2008: 306 and 309–310). Yumaism—as well as the transformation of Srijunga into a religious figure—took a new turn in 2004, when a 15-year-old Limbu woman from Darap in West Sikkim was possessed by Yumamang, and was consequently accepted as the reincarnation of Srijunga. A meditation centre was opened for her in the village (Yuma Mang Meditation Centre). Similarly to present-day Hindu ascetics, the young woman—known as Sri Srima Yuma Mang—does not eat salt, boiled water, rice or cereals, and delivers speeches during the various Limbu celebrations focusing on spirituality and on compassion and mutual respect among people of all faiths and origins (see Gustavsson 2017).

Since the 1980s, several Limbu rituals have been given larger prominence and have been transformed into community and temple-based public performances. Recent religious changes in the Limbu community thus include a move from the household to the community as the space—and object—of a cult.

Writing down the oral speeches

As in Nepal, the Limbu religious reform includes writing down speeches which were previously orally transmitted amongst ritual specialists; this mainly regards the Limbu 'mythology transmitted from the ancestors' or *mundhum*, which is a system of thought based on myths and a system of practice (Gaenszle 1991, 2000, 2002). The process of 'graphisation' also entailed 'scripturalising' oral texts, in the sense of transforming them into sacred scriptures to form a scriptural canon (Gaenszle 2011: 293). The source of the newly printed and published material is yet to be found and studied; it could either be traditional ritual specialists (Yeba and Phadangma) or *mundhum* already printed in Nepal, where the movement is older. In all cases, the 'scripturalisation' of the *mundhum* not only accompanies, but also contributes to religious reforms.

A few examples of printed *mundhum* in Sikkim are *Yuma Mudhum* published in Gangtok by Sanchaman Tamling (J.R. Subba 1999: 257; see also also Government of Sikkim 2001), and Dr Buddhi L. Khamdhak's several books on Limbu *mundhum*, including the recent (2015) publication of his PhD dissertation, *Yakthung Mundhum: Legwagen Chamiok Thakmellay. Limbu Mythology: revisit* (Khamdhak Publications, West Sikkim). Buddhi L. Khamdhak is assistant professor in Limbu at the Namchi Government College, and obtained a PhD at the Department of Political Science, North

Bengal University. This work highlights the recent move of Limbu literary production and ethnic activism from intellectuals to scholars trained in political science or anthropology; this is highlighted in Nepal, for example, by Dr Ramesh Kumar Limbu (lecturer at the Nepal Sanskrit University), who has published on Limbu *mundhum* and indigenous knowledge.[20]

View from the field: the making of a distinctive culture, tourism and the quest for democracy

In a South Sikkim village, [21] Limbu activists—teachers in a government school—explained that they had founded an association focused on the building of a 'traditional Limbu house.' They had recently finalized the payment for the land thanks to the contributions of other Limbu in the village community, and they expected to start their project shortly. Their plan was to exhibit their 'traditional culture' in the house, that is to say, artefacts and practices specific to the Limbu: Limbu food (organic), language, dances, and so forth. They also intended to open the house to tourism, 'to make it like a home stay, where tourists can have a good time.' This opening to tourism had two main purposes.

Firstly, the association was founded even though another association already existed in the village. According to my interlocutors, this older association was run by 'high-level bureaucrats' who did not want to cooperate with 'grass root activists.' My interlocutors intended in future to merge their organization with the state-level Limbu association, but their independence from the control of the administration at the time we met entailed a lack of public funds. The project of 'linking' the assertion of a distinct ethnic identity to the tourist industry was nevertheless inspired by the government's program to develop village tourismconnected to the notion of 'green' or 'organic tourism'—in order to diversify the rural economy, and to develop 'touristic pilgrimage.' As part of this program, giant statues of Buddha and Guru Rinpoche have been built in South Sikkim as well as the impressive set of Hindu statues and temples of Solophok Chardham in the same district.

Secondly, displaying Limbu culture to tourists served the purpose of 'highlighting Limbu cultural specificity' in order to preserve Limbu culture, perceived as being vanishing. A sense of urgency to preserve the culture had recently been reactivated by information concerning the central government's project to conduct an ethnicity-based census, based on which reservations of seats in the Sikkim Legislative assembly would be organized. In 1979, reservations of 'Nepalese' seats, including Limbu, was ended, while the twelve Bhutia-Lepcha ones (commonly called 'B-L seats') were maintained in the thirty-two-seat Sikkim Legislative Assembly. B-L seats were justified by the fact that these groups were listed as Scheduled Tribes. Constitutional experts later advised that, in accordance with the old Sikkim laws, seats in the assembly should be reserved for Bhutia-Lepcha as a special category, and not as ST (Gurung 2011: 296-300). Limbu and Tamang, who became ST in 2003, were thus excluded from sharing B-L seats. The question then focused on the best way to enable the reservation of their seats in the assembly in a context where eight other ethnic groups had applied for ST status with government support. If the distribution of seats was now based on the size of the ethnic group, the question of identifying Limbuness had understandably become crucial to Limbu activists.

My interlocutors also emphasized that the Limbu had a specific language, which, like all 'ethnic' languages in Sikkim, was about to disappear in favour of Nepali. They further insisted on the specificity of Yumaism, which formed a religious practice distinct from both Hinduism and Buddhism, and which now had written scriptures.

'The need for reserved seats,' they explained, 'comes from the fact that, at the moment, the Chief Minister decides how many 'tickets' [i.e. nominations] the ruling party will give to each ethnic community. We now have three MLAs, including one Minister, but this is entirely at the CM's discretion. We actually have no constitutional rights.'

Concluding remarks

In the ethnic activists' narrative mentioned above, Limbu religious development is the outcome of a claim for the recognition of Limbu as a distinct group, that is to say, benefitting from distinctive practices as well as political independence and representation; the cultural and political aspects are perceived as being interdependent. Besides, religious change through history that are highlighted in this paper led to the present-day emphasis on written sacred scriptures, on a form of ritual purity—following in this respect a parallel path to those of the Rai in Nepal (Gaenszle 2002, 2011, 2013)—on cultural commonality within the ethnic community, and so forth. Here, the politics from which cultural change emerged is not described as mere instrumentalism, but as complex processes that combine practices for revival, preservation or making of cultural identities, and claim for empowerment and democracy.[22] This paper shows that Limbu religious practices have changed through time, and that, through people's agency and in interaction with the social and political context. It also highlights the larger focus given by people, also in response to state policies in India and Nepal, to rituals as 'maker' of a distinct and coherent ethnic community, and as the ethnic community as a site of political action. This paper however does not intend to a give general ethnographic characterisation of Limbu religion, but highlights some main society change from which social actors drew out their views and framed their action leading to religious change. More empirical research on Limbu in Sikkim today is needed, that should also take into account pan-ethnic dynamics and local variations, to take this forward.

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Notes

[1] This paper is in line with research on ritual dynamics in that it supports the view that ritual and social structure mutually inform each other (Barnard and Spencer 1998: 493; see also Bourdieu 1982, Kelly and Kaplan 1990, Bergunder *et al.* 2010).

[2] Even though 'Kirat' has been the label of a religion in the Census of Nepal since 1991, there is little agreement on what this constitutes (Gaenszle 2011).

[3] These groups, however, probably came from further East more than two thousand years ago, and they still have cultural and linguistic affinities with other Tibeto-Burman speaking groups in the Eastern Himalayas (Sagant 1976: 1; Gaenszle 2000).

[4] This figure is based on the official notification no. SNSWD/WD dated 17/09/03, 17/HOME/2003 dated OS/04/03 and 18(3)-Home/7S dated 06/07/78. These communities are organized into four administrative categories: Scheduled Tribe, Scheduled Caste, Other Backward Classes and Most Backward Classes (Sikkim State Census 2006: 49; for detail and history of these categories in Sikkim see Vandenhelsken 2009/2010 and 2011). From a socio-anthropological viewpoint, they include castes (Bahun, Chetri, Kami, Damai, Sarkhi, Mahji), and tribes (Bhutia, Lepcha, Tamang, Limbu, Pradhan, Rai, Manger, Gurung, Sunuwar, Mukhia, Thami, Jogi, Dewan, Bhujel, and Sanyasi/Giri).

[5] The recent attempt by the Sikkimese administration to replace 'Nepalese' with 'Sikkimese Nepalese,' to stress the conception of the category as a 'quasi ethnic group' (Hutt 1997: 102) further highlights its quality of foreignness (Vandenhelsken 2011: 97).

[6] See also Thutob Namgyal and Yeshe Dolma 1908.

[7] The division between 'Sikkimese' and 'Nepalese' was also nourished by a view of their 'cultural incompatibility', largely linked to their religious (Buddhism vs Hinduism) and linguistic differences (tribal languages vs Indo Aryan language). This is also expressed in colonial literature (Administration Report for Sikkim 1933–--34: 28; H.H. Risley in *Gazetteer of Sikhim* 1894: xxi), as well as by writers close to the Sikkim ruling elite such as Rustomji (1987: 8–9; 29; 32–33). As Shneiderman explains (2009: 268 n19), a sense of Nepali national identity may also have played a role in the inclusion of Tibeto-Burman language–speaking, beef-eating groups of Nepali heritage such as the Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Limbu and Thangmi under the rubric 'Nepali,' rather than with the Bhutia and Lepcha.

[8] This was known as the 'parity system,' see Sinha (2006: 7), Hutt (1997: 131–132), Sinha (1981), Vandenhelsken (2011).

[9] This possibility of the Limbu having been Buddhist is contested today by most Limbu, but this is certainly how the Sikkim ruling elite perceived part of them.

[10] See Jha and Mishra (1984: 33) and Balikci (2008: 178, fn 8) for expressions of this assimilation.

[11] 'Merger' is the term commonly given in Sikkim to the integration of Sikkim into the Indian Union in 1975.

[12] Research on this topic is still in progress.

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[13] On this movement, see T.B. Subba (1999), Gaenszle (2002, 2011 and 2013), and Schlemmer (2009).

[14] In 1978, only the Bhutia-Lepcha had been recognized as ST, and the legislators' view was that the 'Nepalese community [which then included the Limbu] obviously does not qualify to be classed as a tribe' (Jha and Mishra 1984: 85).

[15] This figure was 5.66% in 1981 (Census of India 1981). A history of the use of vernacular languages in Sikkim is still lacking (whereas a recent linguistic study has been carried out by Turin 2011). We can venture the hypothesis that local people's lack of knowledge of their 'ethnic' languages could be related to interethnic relations and politics after the nineteenth-century migration, more than to the migration itself, as is suggested by the 1911 Census: 'The Limbus [in Darjeeling and Sikkim] returned Limbu as their language to the number of 22,389 out of a total of or 25,466. The number of speakers is only 354 more than it was 10 years ago, whereas the Limbu have added over 2,000 to their number' (O'Malley 1911: 397). T.B. Subba (1999: 20–21, 44) explains the greater linguistic and cultural uniformity in Sikkim than in Nepal in terms of the 'Nepalese assimilation' of most ethnic groups in Sikkim. He explains this 'assimilation' of the Kiranti in Sikkim compared to Nepal by reference to the better economic and educational development, the lesser socio-political strength of high castes, the larger presence of Christian missionaries, and ethnic diversity in most villages—whereas ethnic groups in east Nepal are spatially differentiated: 'It is for this reason that each community has retained the knowledge of its language, customs and traditions to a great extent in Nepal. It is only recently that the various communities in Darjeeling and Sikkim have become aware of the need for a revival of their own language and culture' (T.B. Subba 1999: 20–21).

[16] Note that the Rai is the largest ethnic group in Sikkim, to whom the current Chief Minister, P.K. Chamling, belongs.

[17] This was labelled 'politics of tribalization' by Sinha (2006). See also Vandenhelsken (2011) and (2014).

[18] Not all Limbu view Yumaism as encompassing all Limbu religious practices. Part of the regret expressed by Limbu ethnic activists is that Yumaism denigrates Limbu shamanic rituals, or even calls into question its efficacy. Limbu shamanic practices are still performed in Sikkim.

[19] Gaenszle 2011: 290; see also Schlemmer 2004: 121, Schlemmer 2009: 65 fn9, Gaenszle 2013.

[20] Self-published: https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Ramesh_Limbu/publications?pubType=article

[21] I carried out five-months of fieldwork in 2010 and 2011 in this village; place and people names are omitted to protect informants' anonymity.

[22] This is in line with Hangen (2010) who argues that ethnic parties in Nepal in the 1980s and 1990s were not incompatible with democracy but have the potential to strengthen the democratic system.

ARTICLE

GOLDEN HAIR: A TRIBAL MYTH OF KINSHIP DETAILING A HINDU NARRATIVE IN THE NEPAL HIMALAYAS

BY MARIE LECOMTE-TILOUINE

In the clustered society of Nepal, which includes more than a hundred 'tribes' and castes, collective identity has always taken on a vital dimension.[1] This is especially the case among the Tibeto-Burman- speaking tribal groups, (today called Janajati in Nepali and indigenous peoples in English), which make up about a third of the total population of Nepal. These groups have been progressively placed under Hindu control, beginning in the 15th century, with the emergence of about 50 petty Hindu kingdoms in the region of the central Himalayas where the Janajatis were settled, which was to become the kingdom of Nepal. The Hindu stranglehold over the tribal populations intensified, following the unification campaign led by the Shah dynasty of Gorkha at the turn of the 18th century, which led to the creation of the kingdom of Nepal. The Janajatis were thereafter subjected to numerous royal decrees and harshly punished for Hindu-specific crimes, such as the killing of cows. They were finally merged into the Hindu caste organisation by the 1854 Code of Law, and subjected to strict Hindu control of their daily life, notably regarding commensality, sexual relations, and kinship rules. Yet, some specificities in these matter were tolerated by the Hindu State, and were soon to form a symbol of identity, if not an area of resistance, among the indigenous peoples of Nepal. It is particularly the case regarding social organisation, which relies on distinct kinship rules, and which the Indigenous peoples of Nepal have retained until now despite Hindu coercion. It is therefore important to investigate the means at their disposal to perpetuate their own practices, and their motivation to do so. Due to the very low literacy rate and the lack of free media until the 1990s, assertion of collective tribal identity in Nepal has had few available means of expression until very recently. In this regard, oral narratives have represented a unique space of freedom and resistance for the dominated tribal groups of Nepal. Central as they were to the Janajati's own religious practices, which rests entirely on oral traditions, oral narratives offered these groups an opportunity to assert their own worldviews, and even to counter the orthodox Hindu norms imposed on them, notably by derailing important themes taken from Hindu narratives. Narrative appropriation has been particularly instrumental in asserting and perpetuating distinct kinship rules, as we will show by examining different versions of a popular story, that of Golden Hair, among the Magar Janajati group and their Hindu neighbours from western Nepal.[2]

The Hindu orthodoxy that was imposed on the various populations of Nepal is no better illustrated than by the custom of hypergamy. Legally defined within the Hindu conception of social hierarchy, according to which wife-givers are inferior in status to wife-receivers, the result of this principle was that only a wife of equal or inferior 'caste' rank was to be taken as a spouse in Nepal. This definition happened to be the exact opposite of that held by the indigenous Magars, who consider the wife-givers as the wife-receivers' hierarchical superiors. Elevating the Brahmanical kinship system to the status of a universal law, the Hindu government severely punished tribal people for offences of this sort, sentencing Magar males to death for having sexual relations with a woman of a superior status, while high-caste males had intense commerce with tribal women.[3] This law, which was maintained until the 1960s, limited inter-caste marriage for tribal males, who found no female partners whose purity status would rank below their group, with whom they could therefore lawfully engage in sexual or marital relations. Indeed, only impure castes were ranked below the tribal groups. Yet, it did not succeed in changing the Magar conception of hierarchy between wife-givers and receivers. We may even postulate that it could have reinforced it, as an internal response from the tribal males faced with the danger of losing their female partners through inter-group marriage. This danger was not negligible, given that polygamy was a common practice among high-caste Hindu males, who frequently contracted second and/or third marriages with tribal women, up until the 1980s. The Magars, like other tribal groups in Nepal, have developed circular practices of marriage, which insured tribal and local endogamy. It works ideally between three clans, along a system of 'generalized exchange,' where the males members of clan A marry women from clan B, whose males marry women from clan C, whose males marry women from clan A. This system offers no possibility of alliance outside the local community, and rests upon matrilateral cross cousin marriage or marriage with one's maternal uncle's daughter, *mamako chori*, as it is called in Nepali. It rests upon a fragile state of equilibrium in terms of clan size, but was still practised in the 1980s among the Magars of Taka Sera in the Rukum district (Oppitz 1988), and it remained an ideal model for their southern Magar neighbours of Darling, in Gulmi district (Lecomte-Tilouine 1993: 71-77). In other settlements, the system was less circular, but the alliance with the matrilateral cross-cousin was still preferential among all the Magars up until the 1990s, and it is still considered an obligation to 'give one's daughter' if a demand for marriage with his matrilateral cousin is made by the sister's family for their son, to the sister's brother. This preferential alliance also continues to induce a number of prescribed behaviours, such as strong respect and love for the maternal uncle, and a joking, if not flirtatious, relationship between matrilateral cross-cousins.

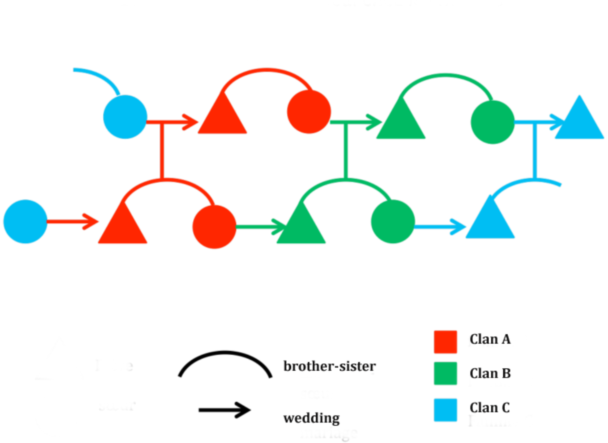

Fig. 1. Generalized exchange and matrilateral cross-cousins marriage among the Magars.

Although less circular in appearance than generalized exchange, the alliance between matrilateral cross-cousins is tightly related to the brother-sister relationship and hence to incest. A literal illustration was offered to me by a Magar teenager, who drew a diagram in my notebook, where I had already drawn some kinship charts. He connected the cousins with a line to signify their wedding, and drew a similar line between the groom's mother and the bride's father, who are sister and brother, explaining that the brother-sister relationship is reproduced and reinforced by the wedding of their children, as if it were a form of transposed incest. Such an exegesis fits well with the myth of origin of the three main Magar clans (Sris, Gharti and Pun) inhabiting the teenager's village, which depicts each clan as the offspring of a brother and sister, who were forced to flew away from their original settlement for having committed incest.[4]

While the Magar perception of matrilateral cross-cousins marriage is that of an auspicious and creative form of alliance, transposing the primordial incestuous relationship between the brother and sister into a socially acceptable lock, this relationship was simply viewed as incestuous by the Hindu government. The latter forbade its practice among twice-born Hindus of western Nepal soon after the conquest of this region during the first half of the 19th century, but tolerated this 'barbarous' form of marriage among the ‘alcohol-drinking’ (Matwali) castes and tribal groups, who were ranked below the Twice-Born.[5] Yet, these groups had to pay fines in order to be granted permission to conclude alliances with their matrilateral cross cousins, not at the time of such an alliance, but in general, as it was seen as a privilege granted by the State to be authorized to practise such a forbidden alliance.[6] In the same manner, taxes were imposed on the consumption of impure food, such as pork or chicken meat, by tribal peoples.

The State therefore followed a double logic, promoting Hinduization and simultaneously taxing unorthodox practices, which represented an important source of income. These antithetic government policies indirectly encouraged the adoption of high-caste practices to avoid taxation. However, despite the taxes levied and the condemnation of their marital practices by the Hindu government, the Magars in the first half of the nineteenth century told Hodgson: ‘Auspicious marriage is with the maternal uncle’s daughter and such must be first sought’ (Hodgson, n.d.), and they have continued marrying their cross-cousins until now, certainly because it corresponds to an ancestral schema, but also without doubt, because it protects the group from appropriation of their female members, especially by high caste males. This danger is well illustrated in the Magar version of Golden Hair, a tale I collected in Gulmi district.

Golden Hair

The story of ‘Golden Hair’ (Sunkesha, Sunkeshi, Sunkeshra or Sunkeshari), is a popular folktale in Nepal, numerous versions of which may be found among various groups and in different regions. The heroine is quite remarkable in this area, due to her golden hair. Similar to the tale of Tristan and Iseult, of which the story of Golden Hair is strongly reminiscent, the sight of one of her fallen hairs floating on the water provokes an (impossible) love for her, leading to various developments as examined below.

A comparative analysis of the various versions shows a common core to the story, along with a number of particularly significant variants. I will attempt to argue that these variants are more meaningful than the common core, as they can be viewed as containing the specific meaning of the narrative for each group. My study is based on two oral versions of the story that I collected in Gulmi district, on two versions collected in Achham district, as well as on several published versions, including one, which was recorded by Purna Prakash Yatri in the Dailekh district and transcribed into the local dialect. The other published versions, unfortunately, have been fully rewritten, and their place of origin is not provided.[7] However, to simplify my purpose, I will examine a Magar version from Gulmi district and a Thakuri version from Achham district, while making reference to other variants only when necessary.[8]

The story tells of a beautiful young girl with golden hair.[9] She has a number of older brothers (between one and seven) and always a single little brother. Her parents, often described as king and queen, are obsessed with their daughter's hair, which they count one hair at a time, every night, in some versions. They forbid her from untying her hair for fear that she loses even a single hair. However, one day, despite her mother's objections, the girl decides to bathe in a river. She loses one hair in the stream. In some versions her angry parents decide that she will be given in marriage to the one who finds her hair, while in other versions the person who finds the hair falls in love with it and decides to marry the girl who has such wonderful hair. It is systematically one of her older brothers, often described as stupid, who finds it. And when the girl learns that her father is going to marry her to her elder brother, she flees into the forest and takes refuge at the top of a tree. One by one, the girl's relatives arrive to try and persuade her to come down. In some versions, at each of her relatives' requests to come down, the tree grows higher and higher into the sky to protect the girl. But in most versions, all of the girl's relatives die at the foot of the tree when the girl tells them that their kinship name in the register of consanguinity is not compatible with their names as in-laws: 'should I call father-in-law the one who is my father?', she says, provoking her father's death, and so on. To avoid incest, the golden-haired girl therefore passes no moral argument, but makes reference to the clear distinction between kins and affines (in-laws) and the impossibility of mixing these two categories of people. Openly stating this rule immediately causes the death of those who intend to disregard it. This statement is probably a central teaching of the story, since one version (Sharma 1976) stops right there: after all of the girl's relatives have died, the tree turns into a prince who marries the girl. Yet in most versions, once the father, mother and older brothers are dead, the little brother comes to the foot of the tree.[10] The difference in the relationship between these inbred is immediately marked by the fact that the younger brother doesn't ask his sister to come down, but whether he can go up to her. The girl finally accepts, and lets down a thread to take him up. While perched up there, all the blunders he makes lead to the creation of a new living environment for them: asking for some food, her sister offers him rice and beans, telling him not to drop a single grain. But some fall, and from them come a house and cattle. There, they both lead a happy life as brother and sister, in a secure relationship where incest is not imaginable, with the younger brother presented as an immature madcap flanked by his older sister.

The siblings live in the forest together, respecting a clear share of the work: she does the housework while he puts out the cattle to graze. She remains hidden in the house, her face blackened with soot to hide her beauty, while the boy goes around boasting about his sister's beauty. Heard by a stranger, who is either portrayed as a king or yogi (at both extremes of the social order), Golden Hair is discovered in her hiding. In some published versions, the story ends here with a happy ending: the king marries Golden Hair and takes her brother along.[11] But in other versions, among which the Magar and Thakuri versions I have chosen to compare, the story continues: the man takes the girl away by force and leaves her little brother on his own. Without the protection of his sister, the boy is frightened and finds support from the cattle. With them, or alone, he begins a quest to find his beloved sister, helped by a musical instrument. When he finally finds her, the story again takes different directions, which bring its own identity to the narrative.

In the Magar version of the story collected in Northern Gulmi, when Golden Hair is abducted from her forest home by a yogi, she spits at the four corners of her house. Her younger brother, coming back with the cattle, calls her and hears her voice from where she has spat. He spends the night at his home, taking refuge into the nostril of a cow, where a bad spirit (*bhut*) tries to devour him. The boy is rescued by his cow, who asks the spirit to count her body hair before eating the boy, and regularly quivers to reset the spirit's count. The boy then sets out on a journey with a drum he has fashioned from the skin of a toad, to find his sister. On his way, he meets a buffalo herder who asks him for a short dance and a song with his drum before telling him which direction Golden Hair has taken. He then meets successively a woman at a fountain, a shepherd, a goat herder, and a mulberry bush who behave in the same manner. He finally reaches the house where his sister is seated at the balcony, combing her hair. From there, she spits on her brother face, then throws dust in his eyes, before the siblings finally see each other. The sister welcomes and feeds her brother with bread. In the night, while the yogi is sharpening his knife to kill the boy, Golden Hair wraps up beans, rice, and her comb in her handkerchief, and the two siblings run off, pursued by the infuriated yogi. On their way, Golden Hair scatters magical objects that become obstacles on the yogi's path. She throws her comb, which grows into a bamboo grove upon reaching the ground, delaying the yogi who has to cut them all; later, she throws her mirror, which turns into a cliff, then she throws rice and beans which the yogi takes time to eat. Nevertheless, he overcomes all these obstacles in the end. Then seeing no other way out, the brother and sister become the sun and the moon by the power of Golden Hair's 'word of truth.'[12]

The version from Achham district, narrated by a Thakuri woman, differs in many details, which reflect the specificities of both the region of origin and the caste of the narrator.[13] Thus, when the boy finds that his sister is gone, he does not craft a musical instrument by himself like the Magar boy, but goes to a Damai (of the musician caste) and asks him to make one for him. The Magar boy builds a *damphu* drum which the Magars use in ceremonial contexts,[14] while the Thakuri boy is offered a *hudko* hourglass drum, which is played by the Damai caste to sing epics in the far western region in Nepal.[15] These regional and group-related adaptations to the narrative also apply to the field of kinship relations, leading to the sharpest contrast between the Magar and the Thakuri versions under study. In the Thakuri version from Achham district, when the girl learns about her father's decision to marry her to her elder brother and climbs on a tree, her refusal does not provoke her kin's death, and the paternal aunt is mentioned among her close kin who try to convince her to marry her brother. Later, when Golden Hair receives her brother at her new husband's place, she refuses to feed him whereas he is very hungry, telling him that the first bread is for her mother in-law, the second for her father in-law, the third for her brother-in-law, introducing a whole marital family, when the yogi of the Magar version is alone, and never presented as Golden Hair's husband, but only as her kidnapper. [16] In the Thakuri version, Golden Hair expels her younger brother from her marital home. He finds refuge in the forest among a society of wild buffaloes, who feed him with their milk, make him a house, and even find him a spouse. Golden Hair finally hears about her brother living in the forest with numerous buffaloes and pays him a visit. Upon leaving, her brother offers Golden Hair a she-buffalo wearing a big bell, asking her not to untie the bell before reaching her place. Thinking that by liberating the bell, all of her brother's cattle would follow her up to her place, Golden Hair unties it. But instead, the bell publicly tells the truth about what she did to her brother, and Golden Hair is so ashamed that she asks the earth to open and swallow her.[17] Golden Hair is thus treated in a strictly opposite manner in both versions: in the Magar narrative, she refuses an alliance which would cause separation with her brother, and ascends to the sky where she becomes the sun, forever followed by her younger kin, while in the Thakuri version, she accepts to marry the stranger; she mistreats and sends away her brother, and finally disappears into the abyss.

The whole story may be considered as a matter for reflection on alliance, sisterhood-brotherhood, and their interplay. Two extreme forms of alliance are presented: the closest possible (incest with one's kin) and the most distant form possible (with a stranger encountered in the forest). Marital alliance with a kin member is rejected in all versions (but one, see footnote 17), and causes the kin member's death or disappearance from the narrative, while a distant alliance creates a great variety of responses, which all deal, however, with the brother-sister relationship.

The brother-sister apotheosis to which it leads in the Magar context is particularly striking and closely parallels social features specific to their group, as we have seen. Big Sister the Sun (*surya didi*) and Little Brother the Moon (*chandra bhai*) endow a dimension which trespasses the context of narration of the tale. The story of Sunkesha is actually the first story that I was told in Nepal, in a village in Gulmi district in 1987. The very context that led to its narration is important, giving this story an explanatory value that would lead us, as anthropologists, to call it a myth. The day before *nag pancami*, a Magar boy came home to draw *nag* on papers for the next day's ceremony, accompanied by his older sister. On both sides of a mass of intertwining snakes, the boy had drawn the sun and moon, each with a human face. He had placed a *tika* mark on the sun's forehead. I asked him why he had drawn it, given that outside a ritual context, only women wear *tika*, and that in my imagination the sun was masculine. His sister, Narmati, immediately replied: but it's *surya didi*, big sister the sun, and the moon is her little brother, *Candra bhai*. The tika was indeed a revealing detail, in line with the feminine gender of the sun. To kill the time while her brother was using my table and my candlelight, I went to get my binoculars for a closer look at the moon. Narmati took the binoculars, and whispered: 'look at the moon, it is stained with sputum. It's the big sister who spat in her little brother's face.' I took a closer look at the spittle and I tried to find out more. However, she refused to tell me any more details, saying that there was a *sastar* that recounted the story of Surya didi and Candra bhai. That evening I learned from Narmati that only certain people knew *sastar*, and that the only person who could tell the *sastar* about the sun and the moon was her maternal uncle's wife. I immediately pressed her to take me to her the next morning. But Narmati was embarrassed and told me two things: you cannot tell a *sastar* in the day, or you become *lato*, dumb or stupid. And not only did we have to cross at night the 'Guye khola' river, which is haunted by evil spirits at night, to get to her aunt, but she also believed her aunt to be a witch. Nevertheless, I convinced her to take me there the next evening, but we took a flaming torch to protect us from evil spirits along the way and we promised Narmati's mother not to eat anything at her sister-in-law's. The maternal aunt, who obviously did not have many visitors, was surprised at our arrival. But she finally told us three *sastar*, including the story of the sun sister, who was initially a golden-haired girl, refusing marriage, who finally rose up into the sky with her little brother and became the sun while he became the moon. Here the story provides an explanation as to the gender of the sun and the moon, and its narration is semi-ritualized, given that it is performed by specific people, at a specific time (at night): these features evoke a myth told in a ritual context, though the specialization is informal and the prescribed time quite large. In fact, there is no word for myth in Nepali, which is designated either as *itihas*, history, or *katha,* story*,* in Hindu rituals. The term *sastar* probably derives from *sastra* and can be translated as instruction. It may refer to a folktale or to a myth, depending on the explanatory dimension granted to the narrative.

For the Magars, the alliance with the matrilateral cross-cousin, *mamako chori*, which they regard as the best form of alliance, is a reaffirmation of the bond between brother and sister, which should be safeguarded. Among the Magars of Syangja, there is even a clear distinction between the maternal uncle who is older than the mother, called *kuba*, (or bad father if the term is of Nepali origin) and the maternal uncle who is younger than the mother, the *mama*, who alone provides a spouse for his nephew. This fully corresponds to the two opposing attitudes of the older brother and younger brother in the Magar version of the story. The correspondence suggests that in this story the Magars discovered a narrative that enabled them to embroider a myth. Indeed, they attach great value to the motives it explores. As a matter of fact, they are also found in the Sorathi narrative that the Magars sing ritually each year in the region of Palpa and Syangja, located to the south of Gulmi, and with which the Magar strongly associate their group identity. Sorathi recounts the story of a king who puts his baby girl in a golden box and throws it into the river, because an astrologer told him that he would fall in love with her and cause his death. The box is found by a fisherman, who raises the girl. Several years later, the king meets his daughter and falls in love with her, causing his death.[18]

In the same manner that Golden Hair is found in a reminiscent ritual performance among the Magar, the Sorathi, in the region of far western Nepal, her character is also present in a formalized and ritualized performance: the epic narration, *bharat*. As in the case of the Magar myth, it co-exists with fairy tales and short stories, but the *bharat* differs from the latter by being considered historical, *aitihasik*.

The *bharat* texts are sung by bards, who also are all genealogists, at least in the districts of Dailekh, Achham, Bajhang and Baitadi where I carried out fieldwork.[19] In this latter region of far western Nepal, a *bharat* narrates the story of Rani Maula, which lies somewhere between the epic and the genealogical account, and is closely reminiscent of the story of Golden Hair. It describes the birth of a dynasty, that of Nag Malla or Nagi Malla, who is considered to be a historical great king of the Doti kingdom. An inscription dated 1384, found at Ajayameru (Dadeldhura), and two copper plates dated 1387 and 1393, mention a king named Nag Malla in Doti.[20] A rich oral history refers to this king in the region of Doti. The story of his birth shares some common features with the *bharat* of Rani Maula. It is said that the mother of Nag Malla committed suicide when she was pregnant with him for having committed *darsan* of the sun: that is to look at the sun while she was impure because of her pregnancy. Her child was born when his mother's corpse was taken to the funeral pyre. This short account deals with the sun, the death of a woman and the posthumous birth of a boy, a future king. At first sight, it is little related to Golden Hair. However, its more developed versions, recorded by Marc Gaborieau, bears striking parallels. In one of them,[21] Rani Maula is the barren queen of King Pirthamdeu who reigns over Ajayamirkot (present-day far western Nepal). The queen undertakes a 12-year pilgrimage in order to obtain a son. While she is practising austerities on the bank of a river, she becomes pregnant by the sun and she loses her golden hair in the stream. Her hair is found by a fisherman, who brings it to the local king, and the latter decides to marry the girl to whom it belongs. Rani Maula succeeds in preventing the wedding from taking place by addressing the king as ‘father.’ Afterwards, she finally goes back to her palace, but her husband has some doubts about her pregnancy. The queen then commits suicide, and a ray of sun gives birth to her son in a pit next to her pyre. The king successfully tests the baby to be sure that he is a member of the Solar clan, and he becomes King Tapi Malla.

Marc Gaborieau recorded another version of this epic, which he did not translate. In this version, the queen is named Devi Maula, and her baby becomes King Nagi Malla (the founder of the kingdom of Doti in the fourteenth century). The king who finds her golden hair and tries to marry her is the king of the fishermen and the queen calls him ‘brother,’ not ‘father,’ to prevent the wedding from taking place. On the way home, she gives birth to the future king Nag Malla, and only then does she die. But the major difference between the two versions appears at the end of the story.

In the first one, it is said: 'Pritham Deo constantly entertained doubts about the child's legitimacy throughout the latter's childhood and he submitted him to various tests. However, Nag Malla always emerged unscathed. His father then sent him to fight a demon at the bottom of a lake and Nag Malla noticed that his father and the demon were one and the same person and killed him. He then became king.'

The final battle between the prince and his father, the king-demon, is remarkable for *bharat* usually recount filial devotion and describe how the orphaned son avenges his father's death to restore the honour of his line, often bringing back his dead father's head that had been carried off as a trophy by the enemy. The centrality of the queen is equally remarkable, for female characters are otherwise secondary in western Nepal's epic tradition. These two features may be brought together: Golden Hair introduces a major historical incident in royal kinship: the breaking of the royal line from father to son. The historification of Golden Hair among the Thakuri of far western Nepal was taken even further in another 'historical episode,' linked to the history of the Kingdom of Jumla, during the reign of Vikramashahi who ascended the throne in 1602.[22] It is said that King Vikramasahi fell madly in love with a dancer named Sunkasa, Golden Hair, and made her queen. The king loved her so much that he used to take her with him everywhere, even during the hunting parties he was fond of. It was during such a hunting party that Sunkasa was abducted by the neighbouring Jad king named Jhampan, who had heard of her beauty. To rescue his Queen, the king of Jumla asked for help from the Raskoti King Saimalasai, his former enemy. They attacked Jhampan's fort together, and killed him or, according to other versions, took him prisoner. However, in the meantime queen Sunkasa had already cut her own throat out of despair. The kings of Jumla and Raskot annexed King Jhampan's territory of Charkabot. The two kings signed a treaty establishing the division of the Jhampan's kingdom between the two of them, and this was recorded on a copper plate dated 1620. (Jumla gained the territory between Tusarakhola and Guligada, and Raskot between Khandacakra and Lekhamanma. There were many witnesses to this treaty, among whom there was the Mongolian king Nagmaka). The statues of Vikramashåhi and his wife Sunakasa have been kept in the temple of Tripurasindari in Jumla, while the goddess Tripurasundari of Tibrikot has also been identified as Queen Sunkasa, to whom a cult is said to have been established after her death. Many elements go towards substantiating the historical content of this last story, leading to a real imbroglio between the myth, the tale and history. The core of this imbroglio deals with alliance. In addition to the prohibition of incest and the brother-sister relationship, many other forms of alliance are explored in the last story: between a Thakuri king and a woman of low extraction, between the enemy Tibetan king and the latter, and finally the war alliance between the Thakuris against this Tibetan king. Somehow, the historical reality is closer to the contents of a *bharat* than the actual *bharat* about the golden-haired Queen.

The *bharat* about Golden Hair (under the name of Rani Maula), on the other hand, shares many features with the Magar myth of the Sun sister and the Moon Brother, as well as with the Thakuri fairy tale about Golden Hair: it includes the theme of the loss of hair in the river, falling in love upon seeing the hair, and the impossible marriage with the one who finds the hair. But the transgressive nature of the alliance is not related to incest, and the fact that the queen is married is not a real obstacle, since a union with a married women or *jari bibah*, was (and still is at a lesser degree) customary in Western Nepal. Instead, it is the loyalty of the queen that is put to the test, and as often in the *bharat*, the listener is first led to imagine that she accepts the alliance, when posing her conditions to agree to it, to give the story a twist in what happens next. Interestingly, the stratagem used by the queen to avoid the wedding reintroduces the theme of incest, but with the father and the father's brother (or classificatory father), and in a reversed pattern where the girl proposes and the men refuses.

In the Bharat about Rani Maula, the sun is the golden-haired queen's only true husband, especially in the version where her husband is in fact a demon. The sun is also the baby king's only genitor, since he not only makes Golden Hair pregnant, but even creates the baby in a pit near his mother's pyre. The son of the sun has no human father and is even almost motherless: he is born of a corpse or of the earth. The narrative erases all the kinsmen surrounding him to present his birth ex-nihilo from the association of the sun and the earth. Interestingly, parallels with the *bharat* about Rani maula are found in the Thakuri version of Golden Hair collected in Achham district. When the two siblings, separated by the girl's capture and her marriage, finally meet again, the sister first mistreats her little brother, the latter then causes her to commits suicide in return. Thus, at the end of the story, only the boy remains. In the various "Thakuri" versions of far western Nepal, Golden Hair dies, and leaves her place to a boy, presented either as a younger brother or as her son, whereas all the Magar versions asserts her survival, and her role in the perpetuation of the group as the model for alliance.[23]

The various tales of Golden Hair explore themes that are very widespread in Nepal and India and can be traced back to Europe (in Tristan and Iseult or in the French story of Donkey skin /All-fur in Germany). The story's wide distribution in no way helps determine its origin, but its importance in the Himalayan region located to the west of the area inhabited by the Magars and to its south, strongly suggests that it was spread from Hindu groups to this Indigenous population, which has no history of migration, in contrast with the latter.

In such a clustered society, it is possible to show that the variants of the narrative are all in keeping with the values of the group that produced it. In Western Nepal's *bharat*, a genre patronized by the Thakuri royal caste, the sun appears as the male progenitor of a superior and royal race, while among the Magars, the sun is a female emblematic figure, that of the Big Sister forever fleeing with her young brother to avoid any alliance with strangers. She forms a protective figure that ensures an internal and positive alliance, which strengthens kin relationships and group identity. For the Thakuris of Western Nepal, who strictly forbid marriage between cross-cousins, on the other hand, alliance is not determined or made possible by the siblings. The sister has no major role to play, and even the mother is secondary. These royal clans are constantly reminded of their pedigree and obsessed by their genealogies, which they display as the sign of their identity during weddings. Their genealogies are usually linear and draw the line from father to eldest son only. It is thus a strictly vertical and linear view of descent. This conception finds a perfect metaphor in the ray of the sun giving birth to a baby king in the ground, by getting rid of all intermediaries and surrounding kinsmen. Among the Suryavamshi (Thakuris of Solar clans) of Western Nepal, such as in Dullu, the wedding itself is an alliance of the sun and the moon, since the men of the solar clan marry women of the lunar clan (or Candravamshi). The gender of the celestial bodies is thus inverted, with both the sun and the moon as masculine figures but a strong association of the sun with males and groom, and of the moon with women and brides. The spatio-temporal framework of the narrative is also quite different in the two cases of the Magar myth and the Thakuri Bharat. For the Magars, the alliance between the sun and the moon is the *mythical model* of the *ideal* couple, while this alliance is *actualised* among the Thakuris, who enact it at each wedding and assign a historical dimension to their direct birth on earth from the ray of the sun, as well as to Golden Hair. Though the marvellous is present in both the Thakuri and Magar versions of Golden Hair, in the speaking animals, plants and musical instruments, the Thakuri versions contrast with the Magar tale, which depicts a malleable and transformable world, where a boy spends the night in his cow's nostril, objects transform into categories of the landscape (forest and cliff) and two siblings flew in the sky to become the sun and the moon.

The narratives related to the sun that we have discussed regarding the different versions of the Nepalese story of the golden-haired girl show the multiplicity of representations in different social contexts. This suggests that the symbolic form is not only very polysemic, because of the reduction it imposes on reality, but also because of the variety of the social contexts in which it fits. Yet, these narratives all refer to a single ‘named’ figure. As noted by Marc Le Bot (1989: 62), ‘The myth and the poem think by figures and the names they give to figures are proper names.’ In the stories studied here, a stable element is the golden haired girl, and her name, ‘Golden Hair,’ which holds a special position in how a group represents the relationships between kins and affines.

Lately, anthropologists have ceased to focus on such stories, which have somehow been left to a specific type of specialist, the folklorist, who generally treats this material independently of its social context of production. It is true that the very wide distribution of many stories represents a major difficulty in studying them in context. Yet, in the case of Golden Hair, rather than the common themes, it is the variants that form the core of the story, strongly parallel the group social features and hence its specific appropriation, as the context of the clustered society of Nepal makes it clear. Their study suggests that tribal identity has found in this material a strong form of expression, enabling them to protect their group identity and cohesion, by derailing a Hindu narrative, bringing it a mythological dimension, and playing with figures that were not liable to the Hindu law.

In contrast to Vladimir Propp (1946), who viewed the fairy tale as a degeneration of the myth, there is no traceable historical shift leading to this sense in the case of Golden Hair. The same story is found both as a myth, insofar as it is quoted to explain the gender of the sun and moon, and as a fairy tale, i.e. a story told in the evening to entertain children, even within the same locality. Interestingly, in the case studied, the mythical dimension is only found in a group that attributes major importance to the themes explored in the story to illustrate the brother-sister bond and its relationship to alliance, which is essential in their own kinship system. Building myth, in this case, appears rather as a social imperative related to identity assertion. It is perhaps not by chance that it inscribes the feminine gender of the sun, this paternal figure of kingship, in a reversal that highlights the paradoxical nature of the alliance between Magar and Thakuri.[24]

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Notes

[1] The 2011 census listed the population in 125 distinct groups, including 63 indigenous peoples, 59 castes, and 3 religious groups.

[2] For further reading on the Magar identity, see Lecomte-Tilouine (2009).

[3] In 1827, as reported by Hodgson (n.d, n.p.) a Magar male was ‘capitally punished for commerce with a Khasni widow,’ i.e. a high caste women.

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[4] Incest is forbidden by custom in Nepal. The guilty parties may settle in the vicinity of their original settlement, but are required to cross a hill or mountain crest.

[5] In 1830, the king stipulated, 'We therefore decree that henceforth Tagadhari Khasas should not follow the custom of cross-cousin marriage, but that liquor-drinking Khasas may do so' (RRS, 1975: 48). Khas (feminine Khasni), Khasa or Khasiya designate all the pure castes of western Nepal in ancient texts, that is, Brahmans and Kshatriyas without distinction. Sacred thread wearers (Tagadhari) and alcohol-drinking Khas were later distinguished by the State.

[6] The royal family of Nepal and other Thakuri clans from central Nepal also practise this form of alliance, but I have never seen mention of taxes that they would have had to pay. Royal Thakuris from western Nepal, on the other hand, consider this alliance as incestuous, and the Shah's cross-cousin alliance as the sign of their Magar origin.

[7] Two short versions of the tale were published in English: 'Rajkumari Sunkeshi: The Golden Haired Princess' (Sharma 1978: 100-103), and 'Golden-Haired Princess' (Some Folk tales of Nepal 1968: 11-13). And among the versions of the tale published in Nepali, one may quote: Parajuli (2045 V.S. [1988]), *Sunkesra*, and 'Lato ra bato ko katha' (Vaidya, 2042 V.S. [1985]: 29-32)

[8] The text and audio of a second version of the tale, entitled The Cretin Brother, which I recorded in Achham district, may be accessed at the following link: http://epopee.huma-num.fr/corpus.php (The Cretin Brother, narrator Lal Sobha Tamauta). A third is also included on the same website, but the narrator's name was not collected, and her caste is unknown.

[9] In some versions, such as Vaidya (2042 V.S.), her hair is extremely long, but not golden. Interestingly in the version of the tale collected in Achham district, which is very similar to the Vaidya version, the girl's hair, initially very long, turns golden after her incestuous marriage with her brother.

[10] In the versions from Achham district, some other relatives are involved in this episode.

[11] *Some Folk Tales of Nepal*, 1968: 13.

[12] In a very similar version collected in a nearby village, from a Brahmin woman, the brother and sister simply escape, and there is no mention of their transformation.

[13] The regional form of the tale appears, among other things, in the title. In Achham district, it is found as 'The cretin brother,' and the Vaidya version, whose place of origin is not mentioned, may well be from Achham or far western Nepal, given its title and its plot.

[14] The *damphu* is defined as a 'frame drum with pegged skin beaten with bare hands used by the Tamangs (Hellfer 1997: 188).

[15] On this drum, see Helffer and Gaborieau (1974).

[16] In the two other versions collected from Achham (see The Cretin brother, http://epopee.huma-num.fr/corpus.php), the situation is similar. In one of these versions collected from a Dalit woman, of the Tamauta (or copper-smith) caste, the episode of the tree is not included, and the girl is married with her brother.

[17] In the Tamauta version from Achham district, after marrying her brother, the girl's hair turns golden and, on seeing this, a king takes her as one of his seven spouses. She then gives birth to twins for the childless king, and her babies are thrown away by her co-wives, but later found but their father. As for the cretin brother, he is poisoned by Golden Hair's co-wives, and resuscitated by his sister. But he finally flies away into the sky, holding the legs of a falcon, singing, 'my sister has poisoned me.'

[18] Sorathi is sung in several regions of northern India, but it is not performed as is the case in Nepal, where it includes dance. On this tradition, see Bandhu (2008).

[19] On the bardic tradition of western Nepal, see Lecomte-Tilouine (2016).

[20] On the history of the kingdom of Doti, see Subedi (1999).

[21] The recording and the text may be found at: http://epopee.huma-num.fr/corpus.php

[22] On the history of the kingdom of Jumla, see Adhikary (1998).

[23] The version published by Parajuli (1988) is worth mentioning here, although its origin is unknown. In this version, after refusing to marry her brother, the girl climbs onto a tree, gets rid of her kin members and leaves with her younger brother, as in most of the versions. She is then taken away by two soldiers, and when her younger brother finally finds where she is, he is killed by the two soldiers during a hunting party. Golden Hair has a vision of her brother, dancing, and understands that he was killed. She runs away in the middle of the night and

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goes high in the mountain to hide in a cave. The story ends with these words (Parajuli 1988: 8): ‘Until now, she is staying there in the shining sun, waiting for the sun in the form of a prince to go and take her.’ Golden Hair's association with the sun, and alliance, finds yet another formulation in this version.

[24] On other forms of reversed identity assertion among the Magar, see Lecomte-Tilouine (2010: 131).

ARTICLE

THE GLORIOUS DEATH OF KOTI AND CHENNAYA AND THE RELIGIOUS AND POLITICAL INSPIRATION OF THE BILLAVA

BY MARINE CARRIN

Abstract: The Billava, once untouchables (toddy-tappers), are classed today among the OBC (Other Backward Castes) by the government of Karnataka. Nevertheless, the politics of representation practised by this once stigmatised community expresses itself through social struggles and ritualised identity assertions. The Billava, who formerly were excluded from the temples patronised by the high castes, have their own network of shrines which are not dedicated to the great gods of India, but to their valiant caste heroes who fought injustice. When, from around 1830, the Billava were converted by the Protestant missionaries of the Basel mission, they acquired education and improved their economic status. However, in the 1950s, the cult of the *bhutas,* which had been in decline, found a new impulsion, inspiring peasant revolts. Today, the issue for the Billava and other subaltern communities, is to democratise the *bhuta* cult, which was linked to the old Tulu chiefdoms, while foregrounding that they constitute the majority of the active labour force of the region; a strategy opposed to the regionalist movement led by the dominant Bunts. This article focuses on the heroic death of the Billavas' twin heroes Koti and Chennaya, who are worshipped in special temples called *garodis*, gymnasiums where the Billava commemorate their martial past and perform their rites of passage. The reform of the garodis has been inspired by Billava intellectuals, like Babu Amin and Damodar Kalmady, who have stressed how these places of worship could exemplify equality and resistance.

Keywords: South India, resistance, religious reform, caste identity

This article aims to analyse the politics of identity deployed by the Billava of South Kanara as a subaltern caste. South Kanara lies between the coast of the Indian Ocean and the Western Ghats. Behind the coastal plain, there is a region of low hills where the cultivated and forested valleys running east to west are separated by dry ridges. The language of rural South Kanara is Tulu,[1] and the speakers of this language call the region Tulunadu. Each village may be described as a cluster of scattered homesteads of tenants, cultivating rice and areca nuts, around the manor of a chief. Traditionally, the village (*uru*) forms part or whole of the domain (*magan*e), which was part of a larger region. The chief of this region was the king, while the manors under him belonged to junior lines.

The organization of society in Tulunadu is not centred, as in other regions of India, on the dominant position of the Brahmans, but on the prestigious position that the Jain and the Bunt occupy as former chiefs and landlords. The Bunt, who were formerly the soldiers of the Jains, became rich and powerful during the second half of the 16th century, when they bought some of the land of their impoverished Jain patrons. These lands were mainly worked by members of the Billava caste, originally toddy-tappers on the coast, an occupation which was regarded as a highly impure. The Billavas were more or less untouchables. Today, they are classified as an OBC (Other Backward Class).

Nowadays, the old chiefdoms are still known and find their expression in the *bhuta* cult. The *bhutas* form a pantheon which include three hundred demi-gods. Some among them have a human origin, others stem from a mythic birth or have an animal form (Carrin, 1999). The *bhutas* of human origin fought during their life against the injustice of the landlords, fighting for a noble cause before they decided to leave this world. Among these are the twin *bhutas,* Koti and Chennaya, worshipped by the Billavas who were toddy-tappers, a highly impure occupation.[2] They form, today, the main labour force of South Kanara and they are politically well represented.

The Billavas, worshippers of *bhutas* of human origin

Under the patronage of small kingdoms, *bhuta* worship developed into an organised system. The *rajandaivas* or royal *bhutas,* who are celebrated during the *nema*, a prestigious ritual, are still associated with the coronation ceremony of the local kings (Brückner 1995, Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2003). The Bunts act as patrons of the rituals, and ask the *bhutas*, through a low-caste medium, if he is satisfied with the state of his domain. The answers of the *bhuta* should contain divine justice beyond any social considerations. The medium who voices the *bhuta's* answer may express the concerns of the oppressed castes and demand justice from the dominant Bunt. While descendants of the chiefs try to control rural society, low castes like the Billavas still work for the Bunts, and endeavour to assert their identity in other ways, since they do not share the interests of their old lords. Conflicts between the former landlords and low castes such as the Billavas are not uncommon, and often relate to labour issues (Carrin and Tambs-Lyche 2003).

Some Billavas were serving as mediums (*patris*) in these and other *bhuta* cults, since the members of the caste are known for their ecstatic powers and their ability to pronounce oracles. The Basel Mission, influenced by the Pietist movement, and founded in Basel in 1815, established itself in Mangalore in 1840 (Fischer 1906) and succeeded in converting a number of Billavas. The Billavas acquired education through Christianity, and improved their economic status. As a result of turning Christian, the Billavas had to abandon their social and ritual obligations and lost their tenancies as well as the protection of their Bunt patrons. The missionaries studied the Tulu language and culture, and they objected strongly to the Billavas' performance of the *bhuta* cult, as the rituals were associated with wild dancing, idolatry, drumming and blood sacrifices (Burnell 1894-1897).

The reform movement

At the turn of the twentieth century, Hindu reform movement[3] emerged among several low castes, to 'purify' their religion from rites involving blood sacrifice and libations of alcohol. These movements aim at a higher status in the Hindu hierarchy. One such reformer was Narayan guru, who was born in Kerala among the Izhavas, a community which is the equivalent of the Billavas in Karnataka (Osella and Osella 2000). They, too, were toddy-tappers, and

Narayan Guru argued that the Izhavas should take up alternative employment. Under the influence of his reform movement, the Billavas began to abandon toddy-tapping.

Narayan Guru called the lower caste temples places of filth and superstition, and condemned the worship of fierce local deities such as the *bhutas*. He replaced toddy and blood in the offerings with fruits and flowers (Lemercinier 1994:198). Izhava temples were replaced by shrines and ashrams. In 1897, the guru composed his verses of self-instruction (*atmopadesha satakam*), making Vedanta philosophy available to the masses. He formed an order of *sanyasins* (renouncers) and founded 21 temples in Kerala (Jeffrey 1993:52). Narayan Guru's slogan was 'one caste, one belief, and one God for one man.' He came to Mangalore in 1912, where he founded a temple and an ashram. The temples celebrated the glory of Narayan Guru and had a mirror instead of statues, to inspire each devotee to find God in himself.

Many Billavas in South Kanara adopted his reformist ideas. The new forms of worship, inspired by Vedic sacrifice, were applauded by the Billavas, who soon sent devotees for religious training in Kerala. The reforms of Narayan Guru extended to all domains of activity. However, as many Billavas had no land, it was not easy to leave toddy-tapping. Today, huge differences of income exist between rich Billavas - who are part of the Tulu elite - and poor labourers. These differences can be explained by migration, since a number of Billavas went to work in Mumbai in the 1930s, where they established themselves in catering. Later, many Billavas migrated to the Gulf to amass capital, and set up businesses on their return. In spite of these differences, all Billavas seem eager to assert their common values, although they may use different channels of expression.

The return of the *bhutas*

The Protestant missionaries of the Basel Mission founded schools in Mangalore, Udupi and elsewhere. They started textile and tile factories, in which workers of both sexes could experience a new model of work (Prabekkar 1981). This social reform opened up access to professional training for many Billavas, who soon came to form a new Protestant working class. Nevertheless, the *bhuta* cult had not disappeared, and the new converts had to endure the exactions of the non-converts as well as the opposition of the followers of Guru Narayan. Among the Hindu Billavas and the Izhavas, access to a high caste temple became a cornerstone and a prominent symbol of the campaigns against caste discrimination, both in Kerala and in South Kanara.

In the late 1950s, the *bhuta* cult found a new meaning in the rural power structure, since several peasant revolts were at that time identifying their struggles with the Billava twins, Koti and Chennayya, as well as with other low caste heroes, who became symbols of resistance. Those *bhutas* who had fought for justice could return to inspire oracles and bring their divine justice to bear on the world (Claus 1978, Nandavara 2001).

Myth and ritual today

A particular political order had developed in the region, characterized by Jain kings and Bunt chiefs who were devotees of the royal *bhutas*. But the latter also represent a moral order, which corresponds to the political, since the justice of the *bhutas* concerns everybody. Even the non-Tulu may discover that they must offer a cult to the *bhutas* attached to their land.

Otherwise, the deities will torment them and send illness and other evils. The Bunts would like to represent Tulu autochthony, while Billavas or Gaudas (agriculturists) challenge Bunt dominance. These tensions are reflected in various epics in Tulu, called *paddanas*, such as the epic of Khoti and Chennaya.

These poems represent the narrative frame of the ritual, which lasts at least one full night and involves a possession cult where mediums impersonate the different *bhutas*. But these poems also describe the labour of the subaltern castes, like the Billavas, who used to cultivate paddy and areca nuts in the fields of their landlords. *Bhutas* are the spirits of past heroes or heroines who often died a violent death (Claus 1979). They are frightening and destructive figures associated with the wilderness, whom only the just need not fear. These *bhutas* are supposed to sit in a court of justice in the other wold, a court which should serve as a model for a virtuous king, but they come back periodically and possess two kinds of mediums. The first mediums are dancers, who enact the previous life of the *bhutas* while the epic poem is sung. The second kind of medium, the *darshan* [4] *patri,* reveals the 'vision' of the *bhuta.*

In the *garodis,*[5] which are the temples of the Billavas, dedicated to Koti and Chennaya, the situation is different to that of the royal *bhutas*, since the Billavas try to control the ritual role of the Bunt even if the latter still owns the land. We arrive at a conflictual situation where the subalterns try to take control of the rituals performed in the *garodis*. I shall now resume the story of the twins Koti and Chennaya, the deified heroes who have become the champions of the Billava caste, before turning to the reform of the *garodis,* inspired by different intellectuals, among whom the poet Babu Amin and the descendant of a line of *darshan patris,* Damodar Kalmody, have been instrumental.

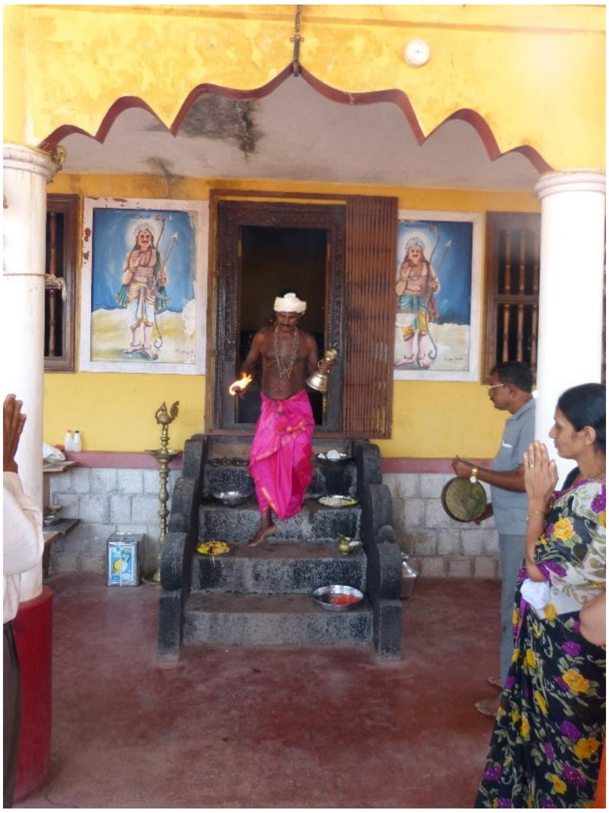

Fig 1. Possessed priest, patri, at Garodi shrine, South Kanara.

Koti and Chennaya, the heroic twins

Formerly, the Billavas were the traditional healers of the Tulu kings and chiefs. Koti and Chennaya's mother, Deyi Baydi, who had been abandoned in the forest since she had her menses before marriage, knew the medicinal plants and succeeded in curing the chief when the latter's life was in danger (Carrin 2008). She was pregnant, and the chief promised her that he would donate land to her offspring. Later, she encouraged her sons to seek their fortune, since she knew they would become heroes.

The twins claim the land that the chief has promised, and decide to offer buffalo races to the *bhutas* whose protection they wish to attract. Then, they sow rather infertile lands, and with other exploits we understand that they have worked to transform the forest on the borders of the feudal kingdom. But the king's vizir, [6] Budhiyanta, is jealous of the power of these upstarts, and to take revenge he beats the sacred buffaloes and the fighting cocks of the two brothers. This is a serious insult, since these sacred animals belong to the *bhutas*. The twins kill the vizir. The sons of Budhiyanta torment the twins to take revenge for their father's death, and destroy Koti and Chennaya's rice-fields.

Then, Koti and Chennaya escape from the chiefdom, but are taken prisoners by the king of Panja. They escape again, and are given lands on the boundary of the chiefdom of Yenmor. They engage in the hunt that is one of the rituals to domesticate the land, and wound a boar, which they pursue across the border into the forest belonging to the chief of Panja. This chief sends a boar, a sign of war, to the king of Yenmor, who has no choice but to take up his arms. His forces are led by Koti and Chennaya.

They are close to victory over the superior Panja forces, when, suddenly, Koti is wounded by an arrow treacherously shot from behind by the Pernamale king, the very one who had been cured by Koti's mother. Before dying, Koti blames the king who, ashamed, tries to commit suicide. When Chennaya sees his brother dead, he breaks his head against a rock, and the brothers go to the other world (*maya*).[7] Here, Brahma tells them they shall be his *darshan patri*, oracles, while the chiefs hear the voice of the twins ordering them to build *garodis* to honour Koti and Chennaya.[8] Suicide implies leaving this world of illusion and injustice. It is a recurrent motive in the *bhuta* epics, where twins share the same destiny after death and represent a superior justice which is true (*satya*) (Carrin 1999, *in press, a*).

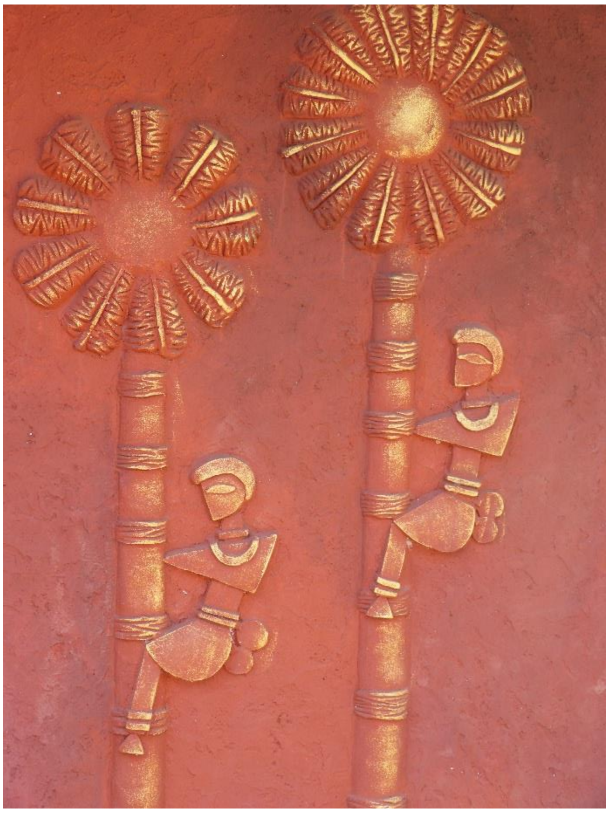

Fig 2. Terracotta fresco on Koti and Chennaya Museum, South Kanara, Karkal.

The story of Koti and Chennaya shows us how the identity of the region is conceptualized through the idea of the forest which is cleared to become a feudal kingdom. It is important to stress that while the kings are often perceived as foreigners, like the Jains who came from the North, the autochthonous and laborious castes such as the Billavas, are considered to be the most important groups of the feudal kingdom in the Koti-Chennaya epic poem. The heroes themselves symbolize the cultivation of the territory since they do the agricultural work and take care of irrigation. More importantly, the epic stresses that when the twin heroes received land from the king, the minister who was jealous of them submerged the rice-fields and destroyed the crops. But the twin heroes killed the minister, fled the kingdom and got new rice-fields. They fought for this chief in an epic battle, which has become a metaphor of the struggle of the oppressed.

The meaning of the death of the heroes[9]

The epic poem of Koti and Chennaya represents Tulu society and its values, from the perspective of the Billavas. It shows us a world where the Billavas try to stress their importance but where they often feel excluded. In this respect, the poem shows the acceptance of the hierarchy, where the dominated try to limit the power of the dominant, without rejecting the hierarchy and the caste system completely. Koti and Chennaya symbolise the region as land cleared for cultivation. Formerly, Billavas were in charge of defending the boundaries of the little kingdoms. Today, Billava friends will take you to the forest of Pernamale, to show you the places where the twins fell. The birthplace of the twins is well known and the place of their death marked by two highly venerated tombs. Their sister Kinnidaru, who has joined them in death, is venerated as protecting women from infertility.

Tulu historians and archaeologists have discovered different statues of the heroes, and argue passionately about the authenticity of these reinvented vestiges. The cult of the twin brothers is celebrated all over Tulunadu in 217 *garodis* which are visited by pilgrims inspired to follow the example of the twin heroes and fight for social justice.

The ritual reform of the *garodis*

The *garodis* are hierarchised, and the most important of them is probably Pangala, which used to function as a military school for the youth. Some of these shrines belong to important Billava families whose ancestors had judicial powers, while others, for various reasons, have a special fame. This might be due to the ability of the possessed *patri* to utter oracular pronouncements, or to the beauty of the ritual performed in the shrine.

As noted above, many of the *garodis* are still controlled by high-caste patrons. While it may be impossible to get rid of this patronage, Billavas may still influence the management of the shrine, which is above all a 'gymnasium,' a place where only Billavas can perform the martial dance which pleases the twin martyrs.

The ritual reform aims at standardizing the ritual style of Billava worship and the furnishing of the *garodis*, and to establish Billava control of all the *garodis*.

> 'Each *garodi* must have six pillars, and its entrance should face East. Each shrine is built around a central pillar *(kamcha*) and has ideal measurements.[10] The three levels of the altar evoke the elements, earth, air, fire, ether, hot, cold and the seven *cakra* of (the) body. The devotee should concentrate his vision on Brahma or Bermerlu and meditate on the courage of the heroes, to get the cosmic energy (Shakti) of the Goddess who is represented by Kinidaru, who is the sister of the twins.'

The ritual which takes place in the shrines consists of vegetarian offerings (*devakryas*) and is called *vrata dare*, which implies that the *patri* must abstain from eating meat and fish for seven days before the ritual, in order to be able to give the *darshan* of Koti and Chennaya through his possession. He should also abstain from sex during this period.

Among the Billavas, twins or brothers may be called by Koti and Chennaya and thus implicitly be destined to become mediums, an appeal which may become imperious. The rituals performed in the *garodi* concern both men and women and relate to puberty, marriage, pregnancy, and funerals. Without entering into detail here, let me stress that these rituals affirm the identity of all Billavas, who need not pay any fee to the *patris.* In the feminine rituals it is stressed that Kinnidaru, the sister of the heroes, is wearing a scythe on her waist, to protect herself from the sexual assaults of high caste men.

We may ask how devotees internalise the virtues of the twin heroes. There are several paths to salvation: while couples celebrate diverse rites of passage in the *garodi*, young men may meditate on the figure of a renouncer, Jogi Purusa, who is present in each shrine and is linked to the Jogi Math of Kadri (the sect of the Kanphata or Nath yogis). [11] The rituals performed at the *garodis* aim at protecting the devotees who receive the blessing of Koti and Chennaya.

The concept of *garodi s*hould express the equality of all Billavas, explains Mr Kalmady, a Billava activist. But there should not simply be lip-service paid to this equality, and this is why the community should provide a salary to the *darshan patris,* the possessed priests who are forbidden from taking up any mundane work, as they are the guardians of the Tradition. Some Billavas have suggested that their priests should receive a small salary from the government, similar to the case of Protestant priests in some countries. By doing so, the government, they say, would acknowledge the *garodis* as the places of worship of the Billavas.

Rituals performed at the *garodis*

I shall briefly summarise the most important rituals performed in the *garodi* which still emphasize the matrilineal ethos of Tulu society, although many households have become patrilineal due to government pressure.

The naming ceremony *pudar depini* ('give a name') takes place on the 16th day after birth. To perform this ritual, the maternal uncle carries the baby and places it in a decorated cradle. Then he utters the name he has chosen for the baby. In some cases, some respectable grandmother may name the baby. The *madhivalti* (washerman caste) woman who has bathed mother and child will receive some clothes, including the cloth she has used when she cut the umbilical cord (*dara*) with a bark. Then *sihi*, 'non-vegetarian food,' will be served in front of the shrine.

The coming of age ritual for a girl is performed when she has menstruated for the first time. She is given a bath by a *maldhivalti* on the seventh day after her menses. She is then decorated like a bride, and the washerwoman will draw a *mandala* or a *rangoli* with white flour. After the puja, the girl sits on a plank, and a plantain leaf is held on her head (*bareda iri*). The priest pours sacred water on her head, and the *pujari* gives her the *pingara*[12] of areca flowers to decorate her hair. Then the girl is symbolically taught how to cook (*kara patauni).* [13] The girl should then be given a new cloth by her maternal uncle, as well as some special food, including a blood purifier made of jaggery, ginger, sesame seeds and coconut. The role of the maternal uncle used to signify that he had a right to retain the girl as a wife for his son, a custom which is not frequently observed today. To conclude the ceremony, the *maldhivalti* and all the guests will be given festive food.

In annual rituals, Billava families bring their children to the *garodi* to be blessed by the mediums of Koti and Chennaya. During these annual rituals of protection, a male medium impersonates Deyi Baideti, the mother of the twins, who blesses the children one by one and foretells their future in a few words.

Death rituals, '*saavu*,' still take place in the *garodi.* The mourners take the body of the deceased to the courtyard of the shrine. The washerwoman acts as a funeral priest and bathes the body of the deceased. The nephews of the departed apply a mixture of coconut and turmeric powder to the corpse. To conclude the ceremony, the relatives pour sacred water to include the deceased among the ancestors. Then they share a meal of rice and boiled vegetables.

Engagement rituals can be performed in the *garodis*, but marriages are generally celebrated in Guru Narayana temples, where special priests trained in Kerala perform Vedic rituals on behalf of the couple. Rural Billavas do not seem to feel any contradiction in worshipping in the Guru Narayana temple when they go to town, although they patronize the *garodi* of their own village. Billavas living in towns like Mangalore might choose either to pray in the *garodi* or in the Guru Narayana temple. Both places of worship emphasise the values of equality, courage and resistance.

The rites of passage and the rites of protection performed in the *garodis* are associated with matrilineal values. But the main rituals in the *garodis* are the *bhuta kolas*, the rituals performed annually in honor of Koti and Chennaya. Preeminent Billava families may own a *garodi* or have a ritual connection with their ancestors' village shrine. In some cases, as for Babu Amin, this ritual privilege might orient the engagement of the devotee.

Bannanje Babu Amin, poet and writer[14]

Babu Amin was born in Bannanje, near Udupi in 1945 as the last of nine children. He received a middle school education and went to work as a clerk in a medical college. In 1977, he went to Mumbai, where he worked in the office of a chemical firm, and in other jobs.

Though he was unable to find a permanent job in Mumbai, Babu Amin acquired fame in other fields. He became a writer and a *yaksagana* [15] artist. His involvement in religious activities was important since he was able to perform the legendary story of the deity Sanni (Shani)[16] whose follower he had become. Similarly, the Tulu poet proved himself able to act as a mediator (*madipu)*, to interpret the oracle of the *bhutas*. These different abilities inspired him to write on Koti and Chennaya when he was living in Mumbai, between 1978 and 1990.

After the publication of this story, he began research on the *garodis* dedicated to the twin heroes (with a team of fieldworkers), and published a book with Mohan Kotiar, recording their results (Babu Amin and Mohan Kotiar 1990). One of the aims of the study was also to clarify which of the *garodis* were managed by the Billava, and which ones were still under Bunt influence.

As Babu Amin told me[17], commenting on the epic poem of Koti and Chennaya: 'When one plays with a competitive mind, the result is a disaster. Koti and Chennaya win because the minister's sons have played tricks and the competition stands for the deep rivalry between Koti and Chennaya and the minister's sons, who would like to become kings and fear the power of Koti and Chennaya, who are in the king's favour.' Koti and Chennaya as perfect twins are not rivals but feel solidarity, and this quality is important for the Billava as an oppressed community (Carrin 2012).

Promoting the architectural reform of the *garodis*, the Billava tried to gain monopoly over their shrines, as they felt they had been excluded from the 'big temples.' Babu Amin told me how he remembers being beaten by Bunt men as a boy, for having sneaked into a big temple dedicated to Shiva. Since that day, he swore to himself that 'the Billavas had better worship their heroes in their *garodis* rather than entering Hindu temples where they were not welcome.' The Billava, who used to be excluded from the temples patronized by the high castes, have their own network of shrines which are not dedicated to the great gods of India, but to Koti and Chennaya. The issue, for the Billava, is to democratize the *bhuta* cult, which was linked to the old Tulu chiefdoms, while foregrounding that they constitute the majority of the active labour force of the region; a strategy opposed to the regionalist movement led by the high castes.

Babu Amin as a ritual expert and a critic of reinvented rituals

Babu Amin's family had a historical connection with the Kadekar Kidyoor *garodi* where his elders had the honour of being addressed by the Koti and Chennaya mediums at the time of the annual festival. When he was thirteen, he had the privilege of carrying the *challanageije* (a brief worn by the priest medium at a possession ritual) from the house of a Bunt family located near his house in Bananje to the temple dedicated to the folk deity, Kollapu Pancha Dhumavati.[18] The same year, he learned to officiate as an interlocutor (*madipu*) during the *bhuta* kola. Later on, Babu Amin reflected on this ritual knowledge in some of his books, including *Daivagala Madidalli* (Amidst Folk Deities, 2002) which includes the stories of six *bhutas,* told to him by different mediums. Some of these stories relate to *bhutas* of human origin who were made to suffer like Kordababbu. Kordababbu was an orphan boy adopted by a certain Kodanga Bannara. But the boy was pushed into a well, which was sealed by a villain from a higher caste. Then Kordababbu was rescued by a low caste maiden, Thannimaniga. Later, both renounced their physical existence and entered the other world (*maya*). In many of these folk poems, the heroes leave the world when they can no longer contain their anger, and sometimes they try to destroy their class enemies, ultimately leaving a world where they feel they have no real place. This ritually conveyed knowledge has inspired Babu Amin's awareness of the humiliations endured by his caste-fellows.

Babu Amin's other books relate other tales of exploitation, when low castes heroes and heroines meet an unjust death and become deified. Other books, such as *Nudikatte,* published in 2006, contain prayers to the *bhutas* and oracular pronouncements. This book classifies the *bhutas* according to their mode of worship and discusses the kind of offerings one should make to these deities. This book has become a kind of guidebook in Tulu rituals and is very popular. Other works by Babu Amin include novels and short stories which attempt to capture village life. Babu Amin felt the need to found his own publishing house to publish his books. Later, he founded two awards to be presented to outstanding persons in the field of Tulu folklore: one for research and the other for an exceptional folklore artist. Dooja Poojary (2010), who has written a short biography of Babu Amin, underlines how the poet has revived Tulu folklore (*janapada*) for which a commemorative volume was published in his honour in 2003. I should stress that Babu Amin represents an interesting interpretation of the revival of the *bhuta* cults since he explains in his work why Billava should worship their caste champions. For the Tulu poet, this worship represents an act of resistance, since it allows the Billava to stand apart from the other Hindus in the region - an attitude that, however, some Billava contest.

In his writing, Babu Amin has criticized the attempt to impose alien elements on the traditional Tuluva culture. Thus he criticises the new custom of consulting an astrologer to fix an auspicious day for presenting a sari and flowers to the expectant mother at the pregnancy ceremony in the *garodi* (Nudikatte 2007:18).[19] He also disapproves of the practice where a pregnant woman should touch the feet of the elders of the family, to seek their blessing - a symbolic gesture 'which tortures the lady.' The poet has also raised his voice in favour of widows, telling me that today, a woman becoming a widow is capable of deciding herself if she wants, or not, to remove her bangles, arguing against the authoritarian elders who, too often, constrain the woman as a widow.

More generally, Babu Amin has protested against the introduction of Vedic rites in Tulu funerals, and he laments the new custom of going to Gokarna (a holy place in the Uttara Kannada district) to immerse the bones and ashes of the dead. These Vedic procedures, says Babu Amin, have now entered the shrines of Koti and Chennaya, and he denounces the Vedic priests (sometimes Brahmans) who have changed the nature of the *bhutas.* They were protective but have been turned into punishing deities. Other criticisms concern the astrological calculations in use in Hindu temples which have now been introduced in the *garodis*. But Babu Amin is even more critical of the newly rich among the Billava who indulge in ostentation, have introduced silver ornaments instead of flowers in the costumes of the mediums, and spoil the village rituals.

This criticism also concerns the so-called modernization of the *garodis* by applying excessive marble ornamentation on the old wooden structures of the shrines that wealthy Billava control. The main disputes over the control of *garodis* concern the leadership of the shrine since the caste members who obtain leadership will be able to impose their views on ritual matters as well as taking decisions concerning the renovation of the shrine.

A dispute in Yermal garodi

Two *darshan patris (*possessed mediums*)* were contesting the leadership of the *garodi* of Yermal*,* a village on the coastal area. The dispute was about the "improvement" of the *garodi*. One *darshan patri* was from Yermal, another was from Sude, a neighbouring village. Both wanted the leadership in order to impose their views.

The British helped renovate the *garodi* in 1936, but since then only minor repairs have been carried out. The *patri* from Sude wanted to modernise the shrine 'in a moderate way' by taking contributions from the people, and he presented his view as 'democratic' and in accordance with the policy of the Billava caste association (Sangha). The other *patri,* from Yermal, wanted to involve the Iruena family, rich Bunts who had made money in Mumbai. One day, they were discussing the matter inside the *garodi* when a representative of the Iruena family declared that they wanted to do everything alone. He argued that Mrs. Harinidamar, one lady of their family, had already given money. To settle the matter, the *darshan patri* said that he would look at the vegetal offerings brought by the devotees (*areke*), become possessed, and tell the truth. A Billava friend who had taken me to the shrine, thought it would be better if everybody contributed to the renovation, otherwise, he said, 'people will not come anymore to the *garodi*: It will become a private place only.'

Then, the Pangala gudde family, influential Billavas who control the Pangala *garodi,* where Billava youth once received their military training, entered the dispute saying 'they would also do it.' More than five lakh rupees was needed to renovate the shrine, and they had only 48 days to finish the work, before celebrating an important ritual in February. Both the rich families wanted to finish the work quickly, although ninety per cent of the people thought it would be better to finance the improvements from contributions from the people.

The 'dispute was discussed' (*panchattige)* but could not be settled, and a new ritual had to be performed. In other words, the decision was to wait for the oracular pronouncement of the mediums of Koti and Chennaya. Then a rich devotee from the Iruena family brought two bronze idols of the twin heroes in a basket and offered them to the *garodi*. This donation meant, implicitly, that the Iruena family wanted to take control of the shrine. After the ceremony to install the idols had been performed inside the shrine, some of my Billava companions said they have been cheated once more by the Bunt and their money, and they felt dispossessed of their place of worship.

This story shows us how the rich Bunts or Billavas try to maintain monopoly of the management of the shrines, by giving sumptuous donations, in spite of the fact that the *garodis* stand for the two heroes, who struggled for equality and justice. Many Billavas feel they have fought for social justice, and proudly declare that they have accomplished social reforms through their caste association.

Preeminent personalities, such as Babu Amin, have played a decisive role in the caste association. This shows that the same person may well be involved in ritual reforms and in social work. In 1988, Babu Amin became a member of the Billava association in Mumbai, which had been formed in 1932. In 1991 he became a Joint Secretary of the Association, and introduced revolutionary changes in its policy by working for the development of the Bharat Cooperative, sponsored by the Association. As an editor of *Akshaya*, he wrote columns for the journal on different aspects of Tulu village life, and encouraged the emergence of Tulu writers from the Billava community. In the 1990, Babu Amin returned to Udupi to gather ethnographic material on *garodi*s, and founded a Trust for the Cultural Study of Brahma Baidarkalu, a term alluding to Koti and Chennaya since Baidarkalu is the family deity of the twin.

Among other Billava personalities, I would like to mention Mr Damodar Kalmady, who has been instrumental in developing the Billava Cooperative Bank, and has launched saving programmes aimed at fighting poverty among the Billavas by providing funds to support unemployed caste members.

Damodar Kalmady and the Adi-Udupi association

Mr. Kalmady speaks in terms of class, although ethnicity and identity are always present in his mind. In 2004, he received me for the first time in the Adi-Udupi Centre and showed me photographs of various Billava personalities who were influential in the caste association (*sangha*).[20] Then he commented on the financial report of the *sangha* which was positive, and had generated funds for supporting widows. Like Babu Amin, Mr. Kalmady claims that his ancestors near Malpe were serving as mediums (*patri*s) in *garodi*s. Several times he repeated that he felt very "emotional" towards Koti and Chennaya, whose folk-epic he recorded and published in Kannada, and then in English, translated by S.N. Poojari (2007). Mr. Kalmady not only recorded the folk-epic, he also added valuable footnotes to the book which introduces the reader to the semantics of the Tulu language and to the atmosphere of the folk epic.

Mr. Kalmady has supported the ritual reform of the *garodis,* and founded the Adi-Udupi association, where Billava writers and intellectuals meet periodically. The Adi-Udupi association has received the support of Billava politicians such as Vinayak Kumar Sorake, Member of Parliament, who has been a left-wing Congress minister. Mr Kalmady explains why the cult of Koti and Chenneya is crucial to the Billavas: 'Four hundred years ago, the Billavas had no god for their caste, and we needed some representatives in the other world; Koti and Chennaya were obvious for this since they had fought injustice. As we give a seat to our political leaders like Mr Sorake, they needed a seat in our heart, they needed a real cult.'

Here, the ritual reform is thought of in a terms of a political idiom where the deities have a seat like politicians. The ritual reform implies that the Billavas try to gain the leadership of all shrines where Koti and Chennaya are worshipped, a step which opposes the Billava to the former patrons of shrines owned by Bunts or Brahmans. One of the strategies of Mr Kalmady and his friends has been to promote architectural reform of the *garodis,* sponsored by the Billavas themselves. The shrines must be rebuilt to conform to Tradition and made 'authentic' by the intervention of the Billavas, an operation which is too costly for a single patron. These 'authentic' (*eyade*) garodis allow for the emergence of a collective sponsor*,* the Billava community, which then opposes the traditional leadership. Unfortunately, adds Mr Kalmady: 'Billava donors from Mumbai have contributed to the renovation of the shrines, but some of them have been tempted to play patrons, and this has led to disputes.' As we have seen with the example of the Yermal *garodi*, the Billava try to solve this type of conflict by consulting the oracle, who generally expresses the wish of the deities to institute collective sponsorship! In some cases, however, the Billava who wants to become the patron seeks the arbitration of Bunt or Brahman patrons, a class strategy. Reproducing the hierarchy sometimes seems unavoidable and many Billavas stress that devotees from high castes are welcome, although they try to restrict the entry of castes lower than themselves to the *garodis.*

A museum in honour of the twin heroes, a secular project?

More recently, there has been tension between Billava intellectuals who have taken different positions with regard to the promotion of Billava identity. While Babu Amin expresses his ideas through his books, Mr. Kalmady, although he shares Babu Amin's position on the reform of the *garodis*, prefers to involve himself in 'secular projects,' such as the establishment of a museum in honour of Koti and Chennaya.

In 2012, Mr Kalmady began a theme park project near Karkal, after having received a large piece of land and a considerable sum of money from the State, thanks to the intervention of Billava politicians. From the point of view of the State, it was important to allow more visibility to the Billava in the public sphere since they are numerous and include several active politicians. On another level, the site chosen for the museum, in the suburbs of the little town of Karkal seemed appropriate, as it was already well-known for its ancient Jain temples. With the help of a committee including a few Billava and other intellectuals, the committee had a house built in the Tulu palatial style to shelter the collections, which included mainly antique wooden sculptures of *bhutas* that Mr Kalmady had saved from destruction.[21]

Inside the museum, we find thirty-eight paintings, created by Uttar Kannada artists. These artists, working under the direction of the Billava intellectuals, have painted the most important events of Koti and Chennaya's life. A number of artefacts exhibited in the museum evoke the rural life of Tulunadu. Other initiatives include a huge terracotta fresco adorning the outer wall of the museum, describing the different stages of agricultural work in order to celebrate manual labour, and to express the beauty of the landscape and the value of rural life. In the same vein, the park is planned to include a garden of medicinal plants to alert the visitor to the value of indigenous knowledge, since the Billava were the doctors of the Tulu rulers. This park does not yet exist, but Mr. Kalmady and his friends have prepared its design, and created a model of it.

Inside the museum, a small *garodi* dedicated to Koti and Chennaya has been erected to show the beauty of its architecture. As Mr. Kalmady tells me, 'this *garodi* is smaller (than usual) but its proportions are respected. It is a museum piece: it is desacralised. It is there to show other people, even Muslims, how we pray to our caste heroes.' I felt this statement was particularly apt since it shows how the establishment of a museum is also, for the Billavas, an effort to place themselves in the view of others. Clearly, the museum in Karkal, which is still in progress, is aimed at staging Billava identity.

Outside in the park, two huge statues of the twin heroes have been erected. However, these are not merely sculptures, as Mr Kalmady explained to me; their eyes had been ritually opened, which means that Koti and Chennaya are present in the park. My Billava friends told me that the huge statues of the twin heroes which dominate the landscape would now stand for centuries, prompting me to conclude that they were trying to inscribe the statues of their heroes on the religious landscape of Tulunadu, till then dominated by the impressive statue of the Jain Bahubali of Karkala.

But the choice of Karkal, an old Jain capital dominated by Jain architectural monuments, evokes the past splendour of the Jain kings, which is revived when the Jain Bahubali festival is performed from time to time. Karkal is already a touristic place. When I visited the museum in 2014, I understood that there was a shortage of money to prepare the building to receive visitors. Then, I understood that the situation was blocked due to the criticism of Billavas from the Southern part of the district (the native place of the twin heroes). The opponents of the Adi-Udupi association argued that Koti and Chennaya's story had taken place in the South and that a 'Billava Museum' located in Karkal had no meaning or relevance. Several Billava intellectuals in Mangalore, including Protestants, declared they would not visit the Karkal museum, since it had no connection with the history of the twin heroes.

I found the Museum very impressive and I felt the opponents to the Karkal Museum might be lending too much importance to the local links of the heroes. It seemed important to me that there was a museum to represent Billava identity. Then I heard of another project which made me wonder. In 2014, we were invited to a *panchayat* meeting in Puttur, in the Southern part of the district, involving various personalities, to discuss the project of a Billava Museum complex which was to be sponsored by the State government.[22] This new project included a building, a guest-house and other facilities as well as a kind of ritual itinerary to the different places where Koti and Chennaya had lived, fought and died. This second project was even more ambitious, since it included a kind of memory trip that the visitors would be invited to perform, sharing with the Billava the sacredness of the various places where the twin heroes had been living and fighting. Curiously, nobody protested that this second museum would reduplicate the one in Karkal. When I raised that point, my Billava interlocutors told me it would not be the same thing at all, since only the second project could become a pilgrimage for the Billava.

Although the project was approved and partly financed, it proved difficult to expropriate the land where the museum was going to be built. One year later, nobody was sure that this project, approved by different political parties and by the municipality of Puttur, would ever come to fruition. Of course, the second museum project was supported by non-Billava as well, on the simple ground that 'this was a meaningful place' for the Billava, a place close to the big temple of Subramanian, which had potential for tourism. In other words, the second project was more like a government enterprise, but the politicians were keen to stress that the project was more coherent from a historical viewpoint than the museum in Karkal. The latter, they said, represented perhaps the passionate wish of Mr Kalmady and his friends, who had tried to translate their religious fervour into a museum. When I raised the historical argument with Mr Kalmady, he replied: 'Nonsense! Koti and Chennaya are pervading our lives, their presence cannot be limited to these historical places, they are everywhere![23]'

Conclusion

Cultural productions of subaltern communities have wrought a new set of discursive formations, which convey the idea that ideologies framing cultural acts and events are meaningful tools of protest and assertion. For Mr Kalmady, it was imperative to start a museum, and to save the wooden statues from destruction. He obtained land in Karkal and began his project. When I asked him how he felt about his Billava opponents, he answered: 'I come from a line of possessed priests (*patri*). I have Koti and Chennaya in my blood, I have "seen" the Museum in dream and we have made it.' Here, the visionary scenario legitimates the cultural assertion.

The politics of representation involves subalterns as actors of their own performances, rituals, commemorations and literature, leading to a series of questions. Do these productions reflect only subjectivities, or do they allow subalterns to negotiate the limits they perceive between mainstream and indigenous epistemologies? Social actors like Babu Amin or Damodar Kalmady are deeply involved in Billava religiosity, but they have also contributed to combating exclusion and poverty. With the support of politicians, these intellectuals try to exalt the Billava identity through the renewal of the *bhuta* cult, challenging the higher castes such as the Bunt who would like to control the shrines of the two heroes. The Billava intellectuals have founded journals, and published folk epics and other literature, attempting, sometimes, to follow a more secularist path represented by the work of the caste association and the politicians.

The politics of representation concerns the deployment of a subaltern presence in the cultural field, a *presence* which is not fortuitous, but political. For example, Babu Amin often lamented the fact that he had to finance the publication of his books himself, contrary to higher caste writers who received prizes from the Tulu Sahitya Academy. Ultimately, Babu Amin received a reward from the Tulu academy in 2006 in recognition of his literary contribution to Tulu culture, but he felt that this acknowledgment ignored his main claim, that the poor Billavas were still oppressed.

We must ask, finally, whether the Billavas have succeeded in staging a politics of representation capable of addressing the State, while articulating their political rights. In other words, (Prabekkar 1981) have these cultural performances helped the Billavas to gain more visibility in civil society? While the ritual reform of the *garodis* expresses the need to worship separately to remove the old stigma attached to Billava presence in Hindu temples, the attempt to create museums showcasing Billava identity expresses the desire to show the community's achievements to a wider audience. Personalities such as Babu Amin and Damodar Kalmady have understood that tradition is never neutral as Clifford (2004: 8) stresses, since it documents a rearticulated identity which, here, becomes a process of emergence of Billava intellectuals. As we have seen, the Billava heritage work includes oral and historical research, language description, pedagogy, and cultural evocation through museums and reinvented rituals. For the Billava, heritage becomes a self-conscious tradition, what Fiernup-Riordan (2000: 167) calls a 'conscious culture,' performed in old and new contexts and asserted against the historical experience of loss and stigma.

But while Billava elites succeed in gaining an amount of recognition from other communities, individual households and local communities continue to jostle for positions in local configurations where power and prestige are inseparable, and where high-caste patrons impose their view. Caste identity is still reproduced with a certain stigma. Billava, whether toddy-tappers, possessed priests (*patris*), intellectuals, or politicians, remain in a low position in relation to other communities in the region, and are still stigmatized. As Billava elites continue to forge alliances, the poor are easily targeted by the high caste and the Hindu right. As we have seen, individual initiatives show new ways of staging identity through museums or literature that aim to present a more secularist image of the caste to a larger audience. But we have also seen that the Billavas need to share among themselves the theodicy of suffering which has produced the twin heroes, and which expresses itself through the ritual importance they accord to their *garodis*.

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Notes

[1] Tulu belongs to the Dravidian family and is spoken by around 2 million people. Although Kannada, the official language of Karnataka State, is used in education and administration, Tulu is the native language and lingua franca of South Kanara district, which is therefore called Tulunadu. Tulu does not have a script of its own, but possesses a rich oral tradition. For more details, see Upadhyaya S.P. 1988-1997. Dialect variations are mainly regional, although some communities have their particular dialect such as Brahmin or Jain Tulu, while the Girijan dialect is spoken by various subaltern communities. The total number of Billavas, including those living in other regions, is about two to two and a half million. In South Kanara, they speak common Tulu.

[2] The OBC (Other Backward Classes) are not classified as Scheduled Castes (SC) like the ex-untouchables, but are considered as subalterns in

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opposition to the dominant castes. The Billavas have been considered untouchables by the dominant castes because they were toddy-tappers. Their conversion to Protestantism allowed them to escape the stigma of untouchability. Other OBC in India share the same kind of status and feel superior to the Scheduled tribes or Adivasis, who number 100 million people and often consider themselves outside the caste system.

[3] This a pan-Indian phenomenon, see Dube (1998) for the Chamar of Uttar Pradesh or Hardgrave (2006) for the Nadars of Tamilnadu.

[4] The term *darshan*, here, refers to the divine vision of the *bhuta* that the medium conveys to the devotees.

[5] A term which means a gymnasium.

[6] This term, of Persian origin, is used in the Tulu epic.

[7] In Tulu, the term *may*a (illusion) takes another meaning. Nichter (1977) explains that in Tulu, *maya* corresponds to the non- manifested, the latent and is opposed to *joga*, 'the manifest.' The expression *mayee* means 'he vanished, he became a *bhuta,'* since these deities merge with *maya* when they do not manifest.

[8] For a version of the folk-epic, see Damadar Kalmady (2003, 2012). See also the studies of Nandavara (2001) and Babu Amin (1982).

[9] My interpretation is mainly based on Kalmady (2012) and Babu Amin (1982).

[10] 'Koti and Chennaya have established the ideal measurements of the shrine, the breath of which should equal half of its length and half of its height. These measurements are ideal for wrestling but they are not always followed nowadays…'

[11] On Kanphata Yogis, see Briggs (1938) (1989).

[12] In botanical terms the *pingara* is the inflorescence of the areca flower (*Areca catechu*, L.)

[13] The term *kara* means a pot and symbolizes both the cooking and the procreative powers of the girl.

[14] I express my gratitude to Babu Amin who spared no effort to introduce me to his books.

[15] Yaksagana is a traditional theatre form from South Kanara.

[16] The cult of the Nine Planets (Navagraha), which includes Shani (Saturn), is present in the region as it is in Tamilnadu were temples are dedicated to the Navagrahas. Shani, being inauspicious, is propitiated to avoid evil eye at small shrines where male devotees sing *bhajans* in honour of Shani to ward off evil influences.

[17] I met Babu Amin in October 2003, although I had started field-work in South Kanara in 1995. Later, I often met Babu Amin, who was selling his books in front of the *garodis,* and was very keen to explain his views to me regarding his community. I have met Babu Amin several times since 2012, to clarify some points concerning the worship in the *garodis* or to get some details on the Billava community. Babu Amin does not conceal that some rich Billavas have forgotten their caste-fellows and generally he feels that the Billavas have not benefited enough from social mobility.

[18] Dhumavati is a *rajan daiva* (royal *bhuta*) and a sanskritic deity associated with many temples and shrines in Tulunadu.

[19] My thanks to Mr Jaya Shankar, a Billava lawyer who has helped me to understand some of Babu Amin's books.

[20] I thank Mr Kalmady and the Billava of the Adi-Udupi association who have generously given me their time and attention.

[21] It is customary to discard religious sculptures (*murti*) into the sea when they develop small defects and become unfit for worship.

[22] I thank Prof. Krishnaiah from the Regional Resources Centre for Folklore MGM College, for having taken us to this interesting meeting in Puttur and for the explanations he provided.

[23] To my knowledge, nothing has been published on the history of these museums, apart from a small brochure published by Tukaram Poojari, professor of history, who has organized the Museum of Queen Abbaka in Bantwal, along with his wife and some friends. This museum has received some support from V. Hegde of Dharmasthala, who is a Jain ex-prince and an important local personality. For the museums and the staging of identities in South-Kanara, see Carrin (forthcoming).

ARTICLE

SYMBOLIC ADIVASI MEMORIES AND THE ETHNOLOGICAL MUSEUM[1]

BY LIDIA GUZY

Abstract: This article focuses on museum development in India with special attention towards the inclusion of symbolic memories and the intangible cultural heritage of marginalized Adivasi communities. It discusses the development of Adivasi art through Indian museums.

Keywords: Adivasi, Museums, India, Adivasi Art

Museums and indigeneity

Today's global museum world faces a major post-colonial shift in museum paradigms: museums transform from a perspective of cultural or colonial hegemony to spaces of social inclusion and the restoration of social and historical justice (Clavir 1996: 99-107). Today, pre-colonial people and socially excluded groups, marginalized for centuries, demand a more active part in the representation and interpretation of their own cultural heritage. Western forms of scholarship, collecting practices, strategies of representation and mediation face severe cultural and ethical criticism. Whose history is collected? Who speaks and who is represented? Who is addressed? Does an egalitarian dialogue or rather a hierarchical discourse take place? Socio-political pleas for a fairer world transgressing the hierarchies of the past, shape today's museum debates and indigenous quests.

In the name of dialogue: the new museum movement

Dialogue within different cultures, including their collective memories and experiences have become a major challenge of the 21st century, especially for actors in the realm of culture, politics, museums and science. Claims to give voice to hitherto silent, silenced, ignored or unheard voices (Murray Schafer 2003: 25-41) impregnate the anthropological discourses since the writing culture debate launched by James Clifford and Georg Markus (1986). Since the 1980s, the dialogic discourse meets the premises of New Museology in which museums are seen as spaces of 'social inclusion' (Dodd/Sandell 2001:4). New Museology follows a direction formulated at the beginning of the 1980s by members of the International Council of Museums (Gansmayr 1989: 79-84), having been instigated by a debate about demands for the representation and participation of indigenous peoples. This was mainly led by museum scholars from the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. New Museology strives towards close cooperation with various public groups and for their social empowerment. Demands for the repatriation of items of heritage (artefacts and descriptions) by indigenous peoples are today's expressions of cultural and political struggle over the right and legitimacy to represent their own heritage.

Adivasis[1] and museums

The new museum movement began in India (Chakravarti 2005: 25-30; Basa 2005: III-VI.) in the 1980s, and was formulated with new guidelines specifically for Indian museology (Bhatnagar 1999: 63-65). Under these guidelines, the entirety of India and its inhabitants were understood as parts and participants of a museum. Inspired by the philosophy of Mahatma Gandhi, local communities were seen as the museum's fundaments. The new museology of India was conceived as a community-based eco-museology, where local communities act as curators, narrators and teachers of their own cultural heritage. The role of museum professionals was to be restricted to supporting and mediating these activities. In this context, marginalized and officially silenced communities such as the Adivasi were to be included in museum representation.

Adivasi and marginalization

In pre- and post-Independence India, Adivasi groups have been persistently marginalized (Carrin/Jaffrelot 2002: 21–24). Historically, Adivasis were certainly marginalized well before this, as the history of the Bhil and the Mina in Rajasthan shows, where Bhil were marginalized by Rajput dominance from the 15th to the 16th century. In Odisha particularly, marginalization of Adivasi began with the British Empire and the establishment of the land revenue *zamindari* system in 1793 where the indigenous rulers remained far more dependent on the ‘tribal’ population.

Sociologically, the marginalization of indigenous peoples in India can be seen in relation to the differences between Adivasi cultures, religions and kinship systems and the hegemonic Hindu caste system and local politics of power. Paradoxically, the post-Independence governmental policy of positive discrimination through administratively constructed categories of ‘social backwardness,’ such as ‘Scheduled Tribes” or “Primitive Tribal Groups,’ perpetuated the stereotype of Adivasi cultures as tribal, primitive, non-sedentary and non-urban communities, with a pre-modern, ‘archaic’ way of life. This led to the paradox inherent in a situation where numerous Adivasis have benefited from the political reservation system while sometimes feeling a need to distance themselves from their culture. Adivasi cultures continued to be measured by an evolutionary model of urban modernity, sedentariness and industrial development. India’s industrial boom has continued the pre-Independence colonial exploitation of Adivasi cultures through displacement and industrial environmental destruction of Adivasi territories.

The recent interest exhibited by Indian museums in representing marginalized minority communities can be seen in the present definition by India itself as well as foreign definitions of India as a global economic and industrial power. This obviously produces an official need of the Indian nation to define its ‘own cultural others.’ Indian ‘cultural others’ seem to be best presented in the endangered pre-modern, ‘archaic’ Adivasi groups. The relentless industrialisation and vast destruction of the socio-cultural and ecological diversity of Indian Adivasi and rural communities have created a national need for symbolic compensation for the destroyed or vulnerable communities. This need may also result from directives issued by transnational cultural institutions such as the United Nations, UNESCO and ICOM. It seems as if, in view of the national industrial development, a museum reconstruction of endangered ways of life has become necessary.

The Indian anthropological museum discourse faces the critical retro- and introspection that Anna Laura Jones describes in *Exploding Canons: The Anthropology of Museums* (1993: 201-220) for anthropological museums worldwide. Once on display, indigenous voices seem to have already lost their vitality. After the social annihilation and displacement of indigenous communities, a history of their valuable cultural tangible and intangible heritage may be presented in a museum, sometimes generously sponsored by industry[2].

The anthropological museum's urge for cultural revitalization of contemporary Adivasi communities has a subversive character in this context: the marginalized local communities are supposed to strengthen their resilience and resistance through museums. And this strength, as cultural self-affirmation, can be directed against the state, and therefore may become 'subversive,' as Kishor Basa observes: 'While "culture" has been the key concept in anthropological museums all through, a major challenge of the anthropological encounter is how to reconcile between the celebration of cultural identities of all possible forms and the potential threat some of them pose to the concept of the contemporary nation state" (Basa 2007: xxxvii).

The recent awakening of Adivasi political identity and resistance in the context of the pan-Indian political Adivasi movement and discourse on indigeneity has led to a political demand for regional autonomy and, in 2000, to the creation of three new Indian states: Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand and Uttarkhand. Today's unrest in northeast India is another dynamic of indigeneity struggles and politics of ethnicity (see Karlsson /Subba 2006).

The politicization of culture, the rise of new ethnicities, industrialization (and its destruction of indigenous life forms), as well as increasing cultural-political awareness of the danger of extinction of valuable local knowledge and cultural resources, are challenges confronting Indian anthropological museums. Indian anthropological museums dramatically bear witness to the paradoxes of globalization: on the one hand, they reflect de-territorialized global discourses and act within a framework of international conventions, such as the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2003 and the Convention on Cultural Diversity in 2006. On the other hand, they constitute iconic spaces of local tradition, objectifying the 'own cultural other' supposed to represent the vulnerable and marginalized communities of indigenous India.

Collecting in India

Systematic ethnographic collections were founded in India in British colonial times. Local specimens of crafts, economic artefacts, dress and ornaments as well as objects related to religious activities and musical instruments deriving from indigenous peoples and from rural contexts were collected by British officers and researchers. In the colonial terminology, the collected objects were labelled tribal artefacts, objects and specimens. The category 'tribe' was not used in any systematic way until the end of the century (see Bayly 1993: 165-218). In this context the problematic term 'tribe' was introduced to India (Hacker 2003: 30-32) in the mid-nineteenth century as an administrative and ideological category (Guha [1994] 1951:152-190). The colonial terminology, particularly through the influence of H. Risley (1908), from 1870 onwards, and particularly in the 1890s, was coloured by a racial ideology which categorized the diverse ethnic communities of India according to an evolutionary anthropometric typology (Guha, B.S. 1926: 1-81; Guha, B.S. 1937 [1994], 133-151).

Colonial administrators and researchers gathered the material and visual culture of indigenous communities of South Asia in order either to send them to numerous European museums or in order to assemble them in newly founded museums in India. An example of this is the British colonial research institution of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, which was created in 1784 by Sir William Jones (Chakrabarty 2008:2-28). In 1839, the Asiatic Society suggested the establishment of a public museum in Calcutta, which was finally founded in 1875 as the Indian Museum in Calcutta, the oldest public museum in India.[3] In due course, important collections owned by the Asiatic Society were transferred to the Indian Museum. Following Independence in 1945, the ethnographic collections of the Indian Museum have been administered by the newly created Anthropological Survey of India, which as an autonomous research unit has the explicit aims to document, collect and spread the knowledge on local Indian communities.

From 1945, the Anthropological Survey of India began vigorous collection activities aimed at accumulating an abundance of ethnographic material, including audiovisual documentations of local communities.

Post-Independence collections from India became a symbol of post-colonial pride and emancipation.

An outstanding figure from this period is the British anthropologist, Verrier Elwin. He has substantially influenced collections in India. With the publication of Elwin's 1951 book *The Tribal Art of Middle India,* a new trend arose in India: the focus on indigenous material and immaterial cultural expressions as vernacular artistic forms. As an ardent disciple of Mahatma Gandhi, Elwin tried ardently to convince Gandhi to support 'a separate status' for Adivasis, which the latter however never supported (see Guha 1999). Elwin succeeded in convincing Jawaharlal Nehru, however, arguing for the preservation of their unique ways of life. *The Tribal Art of Middle India* documents in detail the rich cultural and aesthetic traditions of the Adivasi, with a minimum of interpretation by the author. Elwin's work hastened a shift in perspective that was already underway: that artefacts and material culture were a form of art, leading to the emergence of the category of 'Adivasi Art,' also known as 'Tribal Art.' Museums also played a crucial role in India in the establishment of this new category of art.

Creating art and artists through alternative Indian museums

The Indira Gandhi Rashtriya Manav Sangrahalaya, or Museum of Mankind, in Bhopal, the largest anthropological museum in Asia, is an outstanding example of Indian new museology and of alternative museum concepts in India.

This museum is particularly devoted to the traditions of rural and indigenous Adivasi India with its local knowledge resources (see Chakravarty 2005: 25-30; Chakravarty 2010: 137-150: Bhatt 2010:157-160, Guzy 2009: 78-139). It has been collaborating with artists from Bharat Bhawan, [456] a multi-art centre set up by the Government of India in 1982 to create a close interface between the oral, visual and performing arts. The Indian modern artist and later tribal collection director of Bharat Bhawan, Jagdish Swaminathan, influenced the Museum of Mankind strongly due to his appreciation for and collection of tribal art at Bharat Bhawan.

The Museum of Mankind is distinguished from other museums in India by its emphasis on open air exhibitions.[7] The open-air area displays the ecological and socio-cultural diversity of India and embodies a new political and social sensitivity; the long neglected and discriminated rural and Adivasi cultures of India are nationally recognized and symbolically empowered. By focusing on marginalized social groups in rural India, the Museum of Mankind raises its own 'pre-colonial people' (Chakravarty 2005: 27) to a new level of prestige and respectability; local Adivasi communities are understood as pre-modern and pre-colonial knowledge cultures, which have accumulated a rich knowledge on sustainability. Such knowledge is considered by museum professionals such as Kalyan Kumar Chakravarty to bear substantial importance for the survival of India as an advanced industrial nation (Chakravarty 2005: 29).

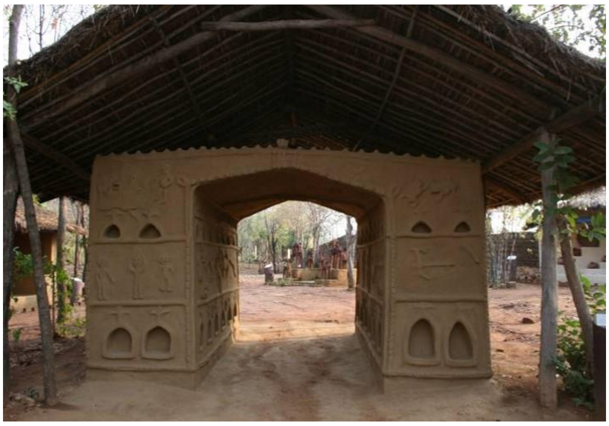

Fig. Mythological Trail, Museum of Mankind, 2015.

With its emphasis on the immaterial cultural heritage, the Museum of Mankind places marginalized and muted voices of source communities in a position to speak for themselves through their own conception of exhibition, manifested in diverse habitat design, or by the Mythological Trail created by local artists (Shah 2004; Guzy 2009: 116). The Museum of Mankind, situated as it is on 200 hectares of land challenges the conventional European / Western museum concept, where artefacts are forced into urban architecture and presented within a context of timelessness. In contrast to the structural inflexibility of a museum, the time and change of the seasons is inherently included into the Museums' optics; the monsoon and the winds change the face of nature, as well as of the mud houses and the outdoor exhibits. Local representatives from different Adivasi communities are invited to give workshops on their healing, artistic or religious systems. Representatives of indigenous communities shape the architecture of the museum's open air exhibits - they build and annually restore the houses in their own way. No-one gives instruction on how to build or decorate. The houses, decorations, paintings and sculptures arise as indigenous creations. The climate and social change simultaneously alter the museum's façade. Urban school children, well as middle class urban visitors from all over India, come to the museum's area to re-discover India's rural and Adivasi identity. Change is included in the museum's vision. The ever-changing range of workshops and local artists are designed to alter both their own, and their visitor's perspectives. Returning back to one's own locality, a new self-awareness as an artist (*kolakar*) is created among representatives of hitherto marginalized and silenced social groups.

The museal representation of Adivasi cultural creativity can be interpreted as a clear symbolic revaluation of a marginalized memory. The Museum of Mankind in Bhopal offers a model for participatory New and Eco Museology for India as a whole. Its exemplary character has affected every anthropological/ ethnological museum in India, all of which are run by either (a) the Anthropological Survey of India (ASI), (b) the Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Institutes of the respective Indian states, (c) independent organisations, such as the Adivasi Academy [8][9][10] and Vaacha, the Museum of Voice in Tejghar (Gujarat)[11] or (d) initiated by private persons.

Fig. Bhasha Museum of Voice, Vadodara, LG 2015.

The Museum of Voice, *Vaacha,* in Tejghar, Gujarat, is a community museum, originally set up by villagers, with the help of a devoted activist, Dr Ganesh Devy. Devy founded the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre in 1996 with the purpose of giving ‘voice’ to Adivasi communities in India (Bhasha = voice/language). The Adivasi Academy was then founded by the Centre at Tejgadh in the Chhotaudepur district of Gujarat, to combine the functions of a national arts academy, museum and library with respect to Adivasi culture, art and literature. Over the years, the Adivasi communities with which the Centre has been actively involved, have expressed themselves through various spaces and mediums such as art, theatre, publishing, journalism and cultural activism. In this way the Vaacha Museum (the Museum of Voice), was created.

The Vaacha Museum at the Adivasi Academy is central to the philosophy and design of the Adivasi Academy. The Museum aims to revitalize the living traditions of Adivasi and nomadic communities in India. The Museum was first opened to the public in 2004 and has since been active in documenting the cultural traditions of Adivasi communities.

Over the years, the Vaacha Museum, through the various activities and programmes at the Language Studies Centre and the Adivasi Academy, has built a collection of audio and video recordings, as well as around 50,000 photographs, which provide insight into contemporary Adivasi life, culture and society. These images and recordings, produced mainly by Adivasi themselves, present the diversity of Adivasi cultures in India, bringing them to life through visual imagery, community traditions and lifestyles as well as cultures in transition.

The inclusion of new media as innovative tools for cultural revitalisation and preservation is a very popular part of the Museum’s online exhibition – the National Consortium of Tribal Arts and Culture (http://www.indiantribalheritage.org/?p=6859).

Adivasi art and global contemporary art

The synthesis of handicraft and art mediated by anthropological and art museums has created a new art market. Today, the work of contemporary Adivasi artists appears in Indian and Western modern art galleries. This trend also seems to give rise to incidents of Orientalism, however, as the Eurocentric/Western construction of the 'Other' in order to define 'Oneself;[12] a feature of the global contemporary art market. The much-criticized New York Museum of Modern Art (MoMa) exhibition *Primitivism in 20th Century Art - Affinity of the Tribal and the Modern* (see Rubin 1984) has become the basis for the new concept of *global art* (Haustein 2008: 83) created by comparing the de-contextualised aesthetics of 'modern' and 'tribal' art as constructed categories. Subsequently, at the art exhibition and show entitled *Magiciens de la Terre* (see Martin 1989; Araeen 1989), at the Centre Georges Pompidou and the Grande Halle at the Parc de la Villette (Paris) in 1989, the organisers tried to present a global vision of art by including an exotic cultural 'other' in the global art world.

One hundred contemporary artists from all continents were invited to present and represent their art personally. Among them were five Adivasi artists from India.

> "In this Paris exhibition, contemporary European artists were mixed indiscriminately with shamans and artists from ex-colonial cultures in a show with a major cultural impact, but one in which the distinctive dominance of the Eurocentric institution remained" (Cubitt 2002: 3)[13].

The criticism arising from both of these exhibitions foregrounded a challenging issue for cultural politics and diplomacy - how to avoid 'racist parochialism' (Cubitt 2002: 3) so as to present 'otherness' (see Hallam & Street 2000; Araeen et al 2002) in a post-orientalist, post-colonial, dialogic and polyphonic way? This issue remains both critical and unresolved.

The 'discovery' of contemporary Adivasi art by the global art market has led to a surge in the commercialization of Adivasi art. A shocking event in this context was the sudden suicide by Jangarh Singh Shyam, carried out in a Japanese museum where he was invited to display his work. Shyam, a member of the Gond community of Madhya Pradesh, was famous as a representative of Adivasi contemporary art, having participated in the *Magiciens de la Terre* exhibition, and chosen as one of five artists to exhibit their work at the prestigious exhibition, *Other Masters*. This tragic example shows how vulnerable Adivasi art can be when exposed to the global trade, raising serious concerns about the implications of the mass production of art, and commercial exploitation of artists. It also raises questions about how to adequately ensure the presentation and re-presentation of such fragile art in the context of museums and exhibitions.

The synthesis of art and craft mediated by museums, then, has opened up a new avenue of symbolic empowerment for Adivasi communities through the art market, although it has also created new kinds of exploitation and vulnerability. Today, many individual styles of contemporary Adivasi art appear in Indian modern art galleries, around the world. The Rabindranath Tagore Cultural Centre in Kolkata, inaugurated on June 1, 2008, includes exhibitions of *jadu patua* paintings, of the itinerant singers of the indigenous Sora community and of the bronze *dokri* figures of the indigenous Rana community, which have become very expensive pieces of contemporary Indian art.

This transnational flow of ideas, commodities and agents, has had a strong impact on the development of the representation of Adivasi culture through the creation of contemporary Adivasi art. One may discern several recent transnational trends in the type of art in demand, as well as the mediation and integration of Indian Adivasi art into the work of western art galleries and design projects. A Fine Line, an artist organization,[14][15][16] based in the United Kingdom and focusing on contemporary crafts and visual arts, has, for example, founded a Here and There (HAT) programme, which enables Adivasi artists to work in Western galleries and design companies. In 2008, Warli Adivasi artists were invited as 'artists in residence' to create 'displaced art' in art workshops. The artistic production of contemporary Adivasi art is now offered for sale in art galleries in the West. This transformation from culture to art, through the mediation of museums such as the Museum of Mankind in Bhopal, is indication of the aesthetization and de-territorialization of Indian museums. Museums have become art galleries of contemporary Adivasi and rural art, leading to the symbolic and economic empowerment of marginalized communities, and the cultural revitalization of vulnerable traditions.

The most recent trends in India towards preserving and revitalizing the intangible cultural heritage in a creative and dynamic way are visible in the new genre of video animation art.

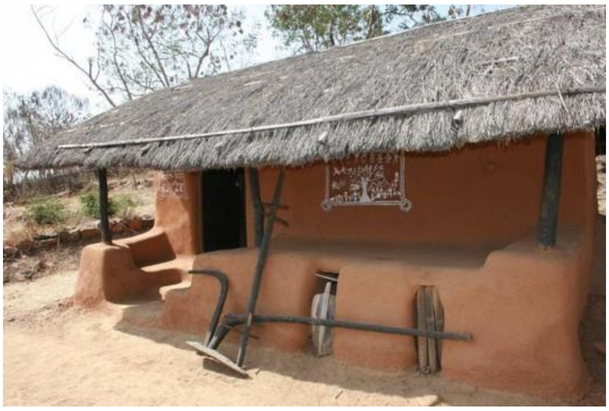

Fig. Museum of Mankind, Sora house, LG

Animation technology as an innovative representation of Adivasi art

The Adivasi Arts Trust[17][18][19] is a London- and Delhi-based charity dedicated to preserving and promoting tribal art and culture from India through digital media such as animation technology, in order to document, revive, and enact the endangered oral traditions of Indian Adivasi cultures. The Trust invites representatives of different Adivasi groups to narrate their own stories via animation workshops, to sing their own songs and to paint or sculpt their own myths. These creative artistic expressions are recorded and brought together in animated trick films. Through video animation art, endangered vernacular languages are reanimated, and marginalized indigenous cultures are culturally empowered. Pioneering projects such as *The Tallest Story* collection, produced by *Highland Animations'*[20][21][22] by Leslie McKenzie, and continued by Dr Tara Douglas from the Adivasi Arts Trust with *Tales of the Tribes* (a series of tribal animation films from India) reanimate the ancient indigenous stories to music and with moving traditional paintings and sculptures. Based upon creative expressions of contemporary Adivasi art, animation video art would appear to be a new medium for transnational cultural communication, and the symbolic empowerment of minority and vulnerable cultures.

From museums to indigenous media

In its quest for appropriate cultural representation of indigenous Adivasi knowledge systems, the new museum movement in India and the Museum of Mankind in Bhopal, with their alternative museum concepts, have planted the seeds of de-musealization.

Today, indigenous discourses find their expressions represented less by museums and more and more by 'Indigenous media.' 'Indigenous media' include creative expressions and productions through audio-visual media, preferably documentary films, produced by representatives of Adivasi communities. Through such films, Adivasi intangible heritage, memories and quests for social, economic, and ecological justice are expressed. Through the voices of NGOs such as Other Media Adivasi Mukti Sangatham [23] in Sendhwa, Madhya Pradesh, the Pyara Kerketta Foundation[24,25,26] in Ranchi, Jharkhand, or private companies such as The Other Media Communications [27] in Bengalore, Kerala, or through organized civil society movements such as the Environment Protection Group, Odisha[28,29] or The Indian Confederation of Indigenous & Tribal Peoples, [30,31,32] the voices of indigenous peoples communicate their own oral histories[33] concerns and discourses. Thus, audio-visual media have helped to give expression to indigenous counter-voices, and acts of socio-cultural resistance.

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Notes

[1] This article is a slightly revised version of the article "Adivasi Art - The Convergence between Tangible and Intangible". In G. N. Devy, Geoffrey V. Davis, K. K. Chakravarty (eds.) 2016. *The Language Loss of the Indigenous*, p 34-43.

[2] India's indigenous population of 100 million is generally referred to as Adivasi, a term which derives from the Sanskrit terms 'adi'= the first, and 'vasi' = dweller (see Guzy 2015; Guzy et al 2015: 12-18).

[3] For example, Romy Kraemer describes in her oral presentation 'Field notes from Bhurkamunda R&R colony,' how the rehabilitation R&R programmes of Vedanta Alluminium after displacement suggested the construction of a museum of culture of the indigenous community of the Soara and Khond in the newly constructed plant villages/camps. This paper was presented at the conference 'Indigenous Theories and Religions-Rethinking the Tangible and Intangible Cultural Heritage of India,' organised by Lidia Guzy, N.K. Das and Ranjan Sahu at the Zonal Anthropological Survey, Jagdalpur, 2-3 February 2009.

[4] cp.http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-9042286/Indian-Museum; Sarkar, Sabita Ranjan 2005. Anthropology in the Indian Museum. In Lok Nath Soni (ed.), *An Appraisal of Anthropological Perspective in Ethnographic Museums of India*. Kolkata: Anthropological Survey of India, 4–12.

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[5] http://bharatbhawan.org/html/about_us.html

[6] The open-air museum is a much older idea, originating in Norway 'Maihaugen' and since copied by the 'Folk Museums' of the Scandinavian and other countries, including Greenwich Village of the Henry Ford Museum in Detroit.

[7] http://www.Adivasiacademy.org

[8] ibid.; Coates / Coates 2009: 116–122; Tylche 2009: 394–404.

[9] Orientalism is the term made famous by Edward Said, that describes 'a hegemony; or rather the result of cultural hegemony at work… a collection notion identifying "us" Europeans as against all "those" non-Europeans' (Said 1979: 7). Orientalism, according to Said, is 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient`s special place in European Western experience. The Orient is not adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe`s greatest and richest and oldest colonies … and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience… Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between "the Other" and… "the Occident"' (Said 1979: 1-2) .

[10] See Cubitt (2002: 1-8).

[11] http://www.afineline.co.uk

[12] http://www.talleststory.com/Adivasiartstrust/

[13] www.westhighlandanimation.co.uk

[14] http://www.aidprojects.org/projects-view-1.asp?login=guest&id=512

[15] http://www.kharia.in/foundation.php

[16] http://www.othermediacommunications.com

[17] http://www.freewebs.com/epgorissa

[18] http://www.propoor.org/ngos/?id=533

[19] Dudley (1998: 160-166).

ARTICLE

DEATH RITES AND DANCE PERFORMANCE AMONG THE SAORAS OF ODISHA: A FUNERAL MARCH AT THE FESTIVAL OF INDIGENOUS CULTURES?

BY STEFANO BEGGIORA

Abstract: This article documents the choreutic ritual tradition among the Lanjia Saoras, an indigenous community of Odisha. The funeral dance, a kind of itinerant procession covering the sacred sites of the village and its surroundings, consecrates the renewal of the alliance between the living and the dead. The arrival of modernity has, however, overwhelmed many of the old customs and this performance, once reconnecting the community with the ancestral land, is rapidly transforming. The article highlights the contrast between the traditional ritual gestures and the contemporary performances held in occasion of the capital's tribal festival (Ādivāsī Melā), where these dances are repeated *ad infinitum* devoid of their original religious meaning. The funeral dance, proudly displayed in traditional costumes by indigenous delegations that come to the metropolis (Bhubaneswar), it is almost a cry of despair, a yearning for identity of an indigenous culture that is now rapidly disappearing.

Keywords: Saora, dance, choreutic performance, Odisha, Adivasi, funeral

Introduction: Some considerations on dance in tribal India

The symbolic and ritual use of dance in the Indian Subcontinent is so diverse and widespread that we cannot but restrict ourselves here to some general considerations. Acting as a rhythmic order, the dance of gods and mythical heroes contributes to the cyclical adjustment and the organization of the world. In a very general way, ritual dances are a means to re-establish the relationship between the earth and the sky - whether they invoke the rain, love, fertility, victory: rendering possible a synthesis between the human and the divine. The prototype of the cosmic dance in India is the Tāṇḍava of *Śiva Naṭarāja* who, surrounded by a circle of flames, represents at the same time the dissolution of the universe and the germination of the new world, the destruction of the old and the reintegration in the beginning of the new cycle (Eiss 2013:19). Taking an overall view, we can say that, according to Indian culture, theatre and dance – which constitute the central theme of such treatises on aesthetics as Nātya *Ś*āstra and *Śilpa Śāstra* – form the regulatory element of the cosmic antithesis between *devas* and *asuras*, gods and antigods, and also the means of human transcendence. In the current era, the Kali Yuga or the dark age, dominated by violence and ignorance, humanity would be without any possibility of salvation were it not confident in the teaching of various texts of Hinduism, with particular reference to Tantra. In relation to art, among many sources, the myth of the dialogue between the king Vajra and the sage Markandeya is particularly renowned. The Viṣṇudharmottara *Purāṇa* (III. 86-66) tells how king Vajra consulted the saint (ṛṣi) Markandeya about the way of salvation (Kramrisch 1976: 425;

Delahoutre 1994: 12-13). The sage replied that only the images preserved in the temple could provide union with God. Therefore, the contemplation of art can be considered as a way of transcendence for man. On the basis of that, King Vajra requested to learn the art of sculpture from the sage, in order to acquire happiness through the worship of the gods. Markandeya replied that there is no sculpture without painting. Moreover, there can be no canon for painting without the knowledge of dance: here it seems to be the basis of the aesthetic experience (Beggiora 2015: 33).

But can it be appropriate today to apply theories of classicism and doctrinal elements of the Hindu world to the reality of the indigenous peoples of contemporary India? By virtue of centuries of coexistence side by side both within the jungles and on the plains, it is possible to at least imagine an exchange of elements, a flexible relationship that has favoured a kind of bidirectional cultural osmosis. Dynamics existed in the past based on this interaction, which probably only in colonial times crystallized into that social marginalization of minorities, with which even today India is coping. This opinion was held by Baydyanath Saraswati (2003: 3-10). I recall him during the days of my PhD; the famous anthropologist – by this time very elderly and retired to private life as a *sannyāsin* in the *kṣetra* of Benares – used to await me on the porch of his house for our long discussions. He tried to analyze the complexity of the village, contemplating it carefully in its structure. Every part, through the symbols of local culture, ends up most likely representing the characteristics of the whole cosmos. Maps of the villages of India show meanders and zigzags in their tracks, but the locals live their world as a continuum of countless circles. These are conditioned by seasonal periods, subordinated to the rise and fall of the lunar cycle, influenced by the position of the sun at the equator, their rotation scheduled according to the climactic year, which in turn determines the timing of subsistence work in rural centers (Tribhuwan, 2003: 11-16). Hence the simple observation that the cycle of life, the cosmic cycle of the ages of man (*yugas*), symbolizes the cycle of growth and decline of the human religiosity. It is interesting to note in this context that the ritual dances of indigenous peoples of India often develop through circular movements, or in semicircles, where in many cases the men's group stands opposite to the women and faces them with a rocking motion. Some apparently complex steps in fact, involving demanding stretches, with sweeping gestures toward the ground, in most cases symbolize sowing activities, the harvest, the work in the fields. In addition to such dynamic movements there is – both in Hindu and in the Buddhist context – the so-called *pradakṣiṇa*, or clockwise circumambulation around the sacred place of prayer or to the deity. Even in the animistic praxis similar dynamics are expressed through ritual. As soon as a fracture manifests itself in the cosmic equilibrium, such as an illness or a natural disaster, it is immediately necessary to try to propitiate the village deities. Among the Saoras of Odisha, the topic of our field, the shaman makes a circumambulation around the outer edges of the village to prevent the entry of malevolent forces. A ritual quarantine is then imposed on members of the community and access is no longer permitted to outsiders. Here again, then, a kind of circuit is created but this time of a social type, inscribed in a community matrix: a *maṇḍala* symbolizing again the cosmos.

The reiteration of the tribal dance can thus be read as a projection symbolizing the strength of the group: a self-organizing system capable of maintaining harmony through music and removing chaos from human or non-human life as it is potentially intended. The tribal people of India, therefore, look at the world as a plurality. Their numbers increase or decrease according to a geometric ratio. So there are lineages, families, clans, warrior phratries, hunters, crafts guilds: individuals in constant relation to each other. The dispersion or contraction of these ongoing relationships create micro-circuits supported by exogamous marriages, learning groups, creative communities, places for meeting in which to develop knowledge, or festivals, or even sacred sites for festivals and celebration of rituals. When we assert that the Indian tribal world is actually a composite reality emerging through a certain complexity, so we allude to social clusters organized through levels originating from historical, geographical and cultural objectiveness: the universe-village forms a unicum that encompasses a variety of worlds and overlapping dimensions. These are societies that to this day identify themselves within a great tradition, which continues to live its identitarian synthesis through dance (Khokar 1987; Deogaonkar and Deogaonkar 2003).

Living the dimension of dance entails living inside a circle aimed at strengthening and enhancing the social dynamic of the village. Likewise, the circle is the *imago aeternitatis* par excellence, the cohesion between empirical reality and the supernatural. [1] Again through dance, men bring to bear what appears to be their highest faculties, namely the awareness of mimicking the cosmic journey.

The German ethno-musicologist, Curt Sachs, referred to dance as the ‘mother of all arts.’ No other art form has boundaries so broad: it involves the body, the mind, the soul, the need and the desire to dance (Sachs 1963). Over the centuries, people have recognized dance as an important communication tool and dance has been a means, since the dawn of time, of expressing with maximum intensity man’s relationship with nature, society and religion.

Since the early days of anthropology, despite its peripheral status within the discipline, dance has emphasized its own social cohesive and integrative function in non-Western societies (Boas 1944: 5-20; Malinowsky 1922: 25). Dance acts, therefore, as prayer, sacrifice, devotion, gratitude, and ritual. In all of these formulations, dance was envisioned as a system of communication that could be analysed through the category of etic and emic, the semantic of body language or the sharing of emotions (Chakravorty 2011: 138; Kaeppler 2000: 119). Movements and choreographies were analyzed to find underlying systems that cannot be observed but must be derived from the social and cultural construction of the specific world. In other words, existing in memory and recalled as movement motifs, as imagery and as a system, movements are used to create compositions, producing social and cultural meaning in performance. Humans dance in front of what is mysterious, unfamiliar, supernatural, since this is a means to get in touch with what is unknown. Words can indeed explain the simple and understandable events of daily life, but not the subtle dimension that transcends the human. If the word could verbally express this empathy with the sacred, there would be no need to dance. It is, rather, precisely clear in the context of the indigenous cultures of India how dance celebrates every moment of liminality: from the ordinary ceremonies of social transformation, rites of initiation, weddings, passages to adulthood, to the greatest mysteries marking the time span of human existence, such as birth and death (Turner 1967; 1969: 95; Van Gennep 1981).

But today as we are facing a period when traditional cultures are vanishing, so also the heritage of knowledge of indigenous minorities is disappearing in conformity with the processes of modernization. Paradoxically, dance remains as a mere footnote of past folklore. Therefore, this essay aims to highlight the contrast between traditional ritual gestures and the contemporary performances held on the occasion of tribal festivals in Bhubaneswar - the capital of the Indian state hosting our research - where these dances are repeated *ad infinitum* devoid of their original religious meaning. Nevertheless, such a performance seems to be the only way for the tribal minorities to reaffirm their existence and distinctive culture. From this perspective, the performative model of culture shifts the central analytic focus of dance studies from movement systems and cultural cohesion of shared symbols to the ongoing processes of cultural contestation and change (Krystal 2011: 3-15; 27-39).

A case study on indigeneity: the Lanjia Saoras

The Indian subcontinent has one of the highest percentages of indigenous peoples in the world. According to the most recent census (2011), they compose nearly one-tenth of the total population amounting to more than 100 million.[2] The criteria for classification of ethnic minorities who are now designated *Scheduled Tribes* are: geographical isolation, backwardness, distinctive culture and marginalization from other cultures. Among these are included today the latest community of hunters and gatherers (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2014: 25).

The use of different definitions for indigenous peoples was witnessed in colonial times, many of which are reported also in Indian literature and in the oldest texts of Hinduism. Classic names are *vanavāsī* (forest dwellers); *girijan* (mountain people); while *ādimjāti* (the primeval caste) and *janjāti* (more widespread in Nepal) probably indicate some possible connection with the concept of caste (Nathan 1997: 114-116). Today the terminology is quite fluid. Many people in the north-east, that is, the seven states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland and Tripura, seems to prefer the obsolete term 'tribal,' or better 'indigenous people,' while others, such as people in Middle India self-identify as *ādivāsīs* (*ādi*– the first; *vāsī*– dweller). The term had currency in the Gandhian period and is today synonymous with aboriginals, the original inhabitants of the subcontinent (Sanganna 1963-64: 3-5). Although the root meaning of the neologism 'ādivāsī' would seem to imply that *ādivāsīs* are the first settlers of the Indian sub-continent, persistent historico-cultural exchanges within local groups make it difficult and perhaps even futile to identify any group of people in India as primary settlers (Guzy et al., 2015: 14). Some *ādivāsīs* might in fact be primary settlers in a specific area, but others are certainly recent newcomers who have replaced the initial inhabitants.

The inequality among the different communities in terms of development and access to means of subsistence, resulted in the formation in the 1960s of a sub-category: the Primitive Tribal Groups, today PVTG (Particularly Vulnerable Tribal Group). The Government identified about 70 groups, today increased to 75, thanks to more accurate census procedures.

Apart for the adaptation processes of groups today clustered near urban centres, and the mass of indigenous people employed as workforce in intensive agriculture, the traditional subsistence methods of the *ādivāsīs* are quite backward and in many cases these recall the Bronze Age. The most widely used technique in this proto-agriculture, a feature of a large percentage of communities, is the nowadays heavily criticized practice of *jhum* cultivation, or slash and burn. This practice has led to a sedentary or semi-sedentary lifestyle in the great majority of these communities. Despite the great changes brought about by modernization, we can identify hunting and gathering activities integrative to horticulture and proto-herding, or 'encapsulated' in the context of agro-pastoral societies.

Our case study concerns the Lanjia Saoras (or Hill Saoras), a small ethnic group with a distinctive culture of great relevance, living in the Central-Eastern Indian state of Odisha. They are part of the so called Savara grouping (alternatively also spelt as Soras or Sauras), one of the largest indigenous tribes of India, including ethnic subdivisions inhabiting areas of the neighboring states of Andhra Pradesh, West Bengal and Bihar. According to the Census of India of 2011, their number amounts to a total of 534,751. Among these latter, the Lanjas are a small minority of only 5,960 individuals. The Indian Government currently classifies them in the subgroup of PVTGs on account of the peculiarities of the territory in which they live, the low level of demographic growth and in general the backwardness of the techniques and methods employed for their subsistence. Living in small groups of villages, they inhabit the plateau rising from Gunupur towards Pottasing, in the Rayagada and Gajapati districts of Southern Odisha (19°6'0" North, 83°58'0" East). Clan organization is absent among the Hill Saoras, but the endogamic society is divided into exogamous extended families (*birinda*) claiming descent from a common ancestor. Their subsistence economy is mainly based on agriculture cultivating rice on terraced fields, relying on the slash and burn technique (*jhum*) sporadically supplemented by activities of hunting and gathering. The language spoken by Lanjia Saoras is Saora/Sora, a Munda language descending from Austro-Asiatic stock, classified as part of the South Munda family (*Ethnologue* ISO: 639-3 srb).

Moreover, perhaps thanks to the fact that they have lived throughout history in relative isolation in the jungles of the highlands, from a cultural point of view, the Lanja Saoras are renowned both for the peculiarities of a particularly vigorous shamanism and for the deep symbolism of their cult of the dead. The *kurans*, or shamans in the Saora language, are the intermediaries between the village community and the ancestors or the subtle entities that inhabit the forest (*sonum*).

Fieldwork was carried out discontinuously in Odisha's tribal areas, over a period of fifteen years (1998-2013), as part of research projects sponsored by Italian universities and governmental development projects.

The cult of the dead and choreutic accompaniment

The Lanjia Saora have a shamanistic religion strongly centered on the cult of the dead. One of the key concepts of this shamanism is *sonum*, an umbrella term encompassing all of the subtle entities, from the forest deities, to the ancestral forces that govern the natural manifestations. But the *sonums*, in the sense of ‘memories’, are also the totality of the dead with which Saoras weave continuous dialogues that are at the heart of communication between natural and supernatural, between the community and its own ancestry (See also Vitebsky 1993).

The *guar,* or funeral ceremony, takes place twelve days after the cremation of the deceased (which usually occurs one day after death) and is considered by the Saoras to be the most important funeral ritual. Ashes are buried in the *ganuar*, the place where memorial stones for the commemoration of the ancestors are erected; the bigger the stone, the greater the importance of the deceased. The ritual requires the sacrificial killing of a buffalo, a psychopomp animal that will guide the deceased towards the *kinorai*, the abode of the ancestors. Usually the beast is struck with a sharp axe blow to the neck, once the head is severed, the meat is then boiled and consumed collectively at the funeral banquet.

According to the Saoran culture, the megalith and the buffalo are a kind of passport to the afterlife. Since the soul of the deceased is imagined disoriented and in pain, therefore in need of several items, relatives should ensure large number of different types of offerings. The whole *birinda* offers him food, alcohol, tobacco, clothes and everything that might be considered useful in his new chthonic existence.

The spirits of the dead (*rauda*) are destined to a chthonian dimension called Kinorai, the world of the dead, which extends below the earth's surface.[3] This dimension – a fairly typical element of the indigenous cultures of India – is a kind of reflection of real life, but in some way contiguous. On the surface the jungle – the dimension of wild nature, the kingdom of spirits and animals (the abode is typically the trees or waterfalls of the local sacred geography), the place of dynamic and creative potential, of chaos – is in some way opposed to the domesticated space of the village, inhabited by men, the dimension of order. This underlies the dynamics of permeability/communication across a complex cosmological structure. On so-called cataclysmic days, when the memory of ancestors is celebrated, the deceased who have reached a happy dwelling in the subsoil, are conversely called to return to their original village, in order to strengthen the ancient covenant between the living and the dead. They pass through the gaps between the two parallel dimensions, which are conceived in Saoran shamanism as: the place of cremation, the mortar at the foot of the main pole supporting the roof of the hut and the *ganuar*, or place of erection of megaliths.

In the immediate post-mortem period, the souls of the dead are fearful, and wander the forest seeking to return to their villages of origin. This is a particularly dangerous phase because, as is commonly believed in many cultures, if they do not receive the appropriate funeral rites, they may become larvae or spectra, embodying the dynamic of revenants (*kulba*). During the funeral, a bamboo structure is constructed containing all the property of the deceased. This looks like a miniature hut, situated on top of a heap of earth, with cloth walls and a roof made with an umbrella. Clothing, utensils, pitchers, weapons, etc., are placed inside. This is considered a sort of transitional house from which the soul of the dead can attend the ceremony, and this will be the starting point for the trip to the underworld. It is interesting to note that all items are inverted: it is a clear symbolism of the nature of the journey. Similarly, during annual commemorations (such as *karja* rituals) permanent structures in wood are intended as huts for clan ancestors. These are set up with items that belonged to the deceased and the shaman enters a trance (*me?er*) in front of them.

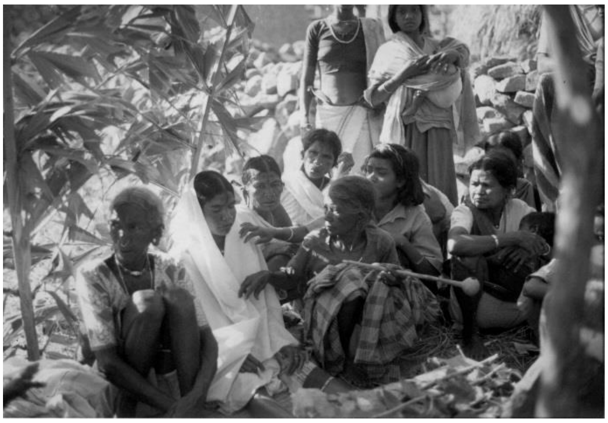

Fig. 1: Regingtal village, kuramboi (shamaness) in trance during funeral ceremony.

The moment of trance is crucial to the celebration, since it is through possession, that the spirit of the dead can communicate with the living, and at the same time its 'formal' presentation to the afterlife takes place. The *kuran*, or shaman (*kuramboi* if female) introduces the deceased to the ancestors and wishes that he will be accepted. Whispering the name is a way to affix the soul of the dead who will be identified as a member of his own *birinda*.

In many indigenous communities, during funeral ceremonies, there is a tradition of making offerings of food to the dead. Among the Lanjia Saoras, little bundles of food are prepared as viaticum for the dead; they are the equivalent of the *piṇḍa* in the Hindu tradition. Within the food offerings, typically the shaman proposes the contextual symbolism of blood and wine: three droplets of blood and three droplets of *alin*, the local palm wine,[4] are deposited on bundles with rice/cereal flour figures before being closed in *siali* leaves[5] and sealed with bronze rings.

While in trance, the *kuran* is seated in front of the *ganuar*: the stones form long rows, abutting each other. This presents the idea that he talks with the dead or, as it were, with their hypostasis. In fact, the community gathers around to listen and support the shaman. There follows a formal request to the most recently departed to accept the new member of the family. In response, the spirits of the deceased possess the body of the shaman and, through him, they receive plenty of alcohol through libations made with a typical carved pumpkin and tobacco smoke.

This long digression on funerary rituals is necessary to understand the importance of dance (*tangseng/tənoŋ'se:ŋən*) and how it is deeply connected with the dimension of ancestrality. Although the scene of the shaman singing his chants in front of the megaliths appears fairly static, this contrasts with the dynamism of the dances that bind together each section of the rite as a kind of leitmotif. In a dancing procession, the relatives of the deceased pass through the forest to arrive at the place of funeral. Other dancers perform in a circle around the place of sacrifice, and again in a circle the villagers celebrate the memory of the deceased in front of his hut. Likewise, in the subtle dimension, the deities and ancestors are imagined as being summoned in a dancing procession. This is quite clear from the translation of the invocations. One of the most common themes is precisely the summoning of the spirits in a single line, from the forest (*tirinbarran*), from the hills (*ekolan*), tutelary entities (*maneji*) and ancestors (*ildaji*) are called to form a procession (*gelgelsitoŋən*) and to dance towards the village. A topos regards the footprints. The shaman can see the rows of footprints left by the dance of the spirits. They are encouraged to follow each other, step by step, and vice versa they should make sure that other evil spirits are not following in line after them. Some liturgies provide consecutive recitation of the names of shamans or village leaders of previous generations; this offers the suggestion of a mnemonic chain linking the shaman to the forefathers. For reasons of space we must defer here to another source for the reading of our translations (Beggiora 2010: 129-48). Moreover, examining the classical murals of Saora, namely *anitals* (*'i:di-tal*), these often portray patterns of dance and choreutic performances. As explained elsewhere (Beggiora 2015: 13-47), this is not a decorative motif, but describes by means of pictorial transposition a subtle/oneiric vision of the coming of *sonums*.

Once they arrive at their destination, human and non-human dancers (*tangseng maranji*) dance (or so they are envisaged) in a circle around the *ganuar,* proceeding then to the house of the dead. On the other hand, if a man dies in his own village, and it is not necessary to move the corpse, they dance in a circle for hours in front of his house. At the end, the departing soul formally receives a white robe (the colour of death, symbolizing also rebirth) that the shaman wears around his head and shoulders, representing acceptance. If everything has been carried out without a hitch, the soul can undertake the long process of transformation into an ancestor, becoming a tutelary of the clan.

Dance as ritual

The first significant study on the Saora people dates back to the mid-20th century; in his *The Religion of an Indian Tribe* (1955), Verrier Elwin has shown how this indigenous culture was emblematic of the *ādivāsī* reality of the Indian Subcontinent. The only discordant note – no pun intended - is that Saoran dance in particular would prove to be the most ungraceful of all India, so much as to reveal an apparent poor attitude on the part of this particular group. This sort of mystery makes the study even more intriguing and can only be solved by putting the performance in relation to its ritual value. As a whole, its evolution is absolutely chaotic and cacophonous: this is its peculiarity. The dance in fact did not come into being as a form of recreation; it was not invented simply for pleasure. From the very beginning, it was a serious business. Its forms depend on the function it fulfils in Saoran society (Elwin, 1955: 214). In primis, as we said, it is more a procession than a dance, and moreover this procession consists of a serious piece of ritual conduct.

Although this may also be applied to other tribal communities, we can observe that Saoras have a unique style differing from other neighboring *ādivāsī* groups. The dance itself is of a simple character, well adapted to its peripatetic purpose. The choreography is confused; everyone participates: men, women and children; infants are kept tied with a strip of cloth and pressed against the breast of the mother who does not hesitate to jump into the group. There are no predetermined steps, but everyone hops and stamps while advancing clockwise, occasionally twirling on themselves or turning in reverse. Men in traditional dress jump with feet together brandishing and waving their weapons in the air. Among the Saora there exists the peculiarity that, to dance, it is necessary that each person brings something in his hand to wave in the air, as well as the musicians who hold their instruments. As Elwin (1955: 216) describes:

> 'There is no singing but everyone carries something (a stick, a sword, a bunch of peacock feathers, an umbrella) and weaves it on the air. The band mingles with dancers blowing trumpets, horns, clashing cymbals, beating drums and gongs, and boys whistle piercingly with one knuckle in the mouth. From time to time they all raise the arms and weapons on the air and give a great shout.'

Peacock feathers are connected to a myth of origin that tells about the death of one of the daughters of Kittung, a primordial deity with a fundamental role in the creation of the world. In honour of the daughter, the god celebrated the first funeral ritual dancing like a peacock and adorning himself with its feathers (Elwin, 1954: 628). This element clearly connects the dance with the funeral ceremonies. Even umbrellas, in some sense, are not just everyday tools but, as we have seen before, can be used in ritual function. It is still customary to swing swords and axes in the air while the dancers rotate at the same time on themselves. Considering the strong consumption of alcohol often reached in these cases, I sometimes found the situation somewhat worrying; but ultimately the safety of all has always been preserved by the *tangseng galanmar*, the head of the dances, who has the task of setting the basic rhythm, expanding the circle when it shrinks too much and directing, roughly speaking, the pace of all the dancers.

During my stay in Rayagada, I attended many dances performed for different kinds of ceremony. In truth, I did not note major differences between a dance performed on the occasion of a funeral and another performed on the occasion of a marriage (although someone has drawn my attention to the existence of a vast repertoire). All proceed according to an itinerant pathway, which in most cases means that the dancers move along a circumference.

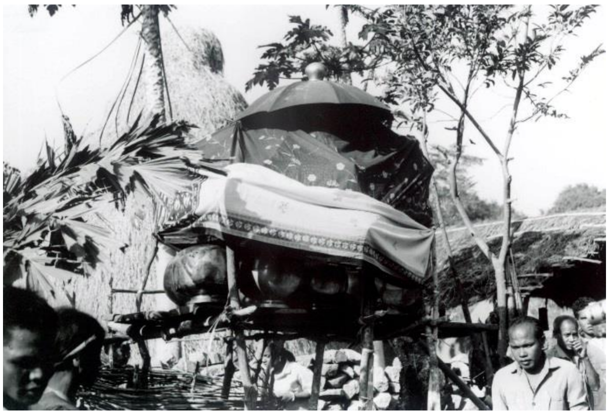

Fig. 2: Regingtal village, altar (with tools of the dead).

The musicians follow the procession; while the percussionists usually march towards the inner side, those who play wind instruments and cowbells of various types follow the procession jumping, dancing and waving their instruments in the air. I noticed that, in these contexts there is some care in working out the rhythm session, perhaps an innate and natural inclination. The Saoras play a number of percussion instruments ranging from large drums of cow skin (*debding*), to various kinds of instruments, whose sound box is derived from the processing of fruits, gourds, shells and carved wood (*tudum*).[6] The rhythms are always frantic, sometimes with syncopated variants. Variation in depth additional to the capacity of the instrument is occasionally provided by means of pressure exerted with the hand on the tensed skins. The actual percussive effect, on the other hand, is provided through the use of wooden sticks and rods according to the case.

The same cannot be said for the wind instruments; apart from a series of small trumpets to whom is reserved the exclusive task of improvisation, the attention is still captured by the imposing horns that Saoras blow continuously.[7] In dancing processions there is the main horn which is followed, in turn by three or four others marching behind. These instruments are really bulky and produce a squeaky and deep sound, depending on the air pressure developed inside them. The musicians proceed waving the horns in the air and jumping; but as soon as the principal horn fits into the rhythm, the others echo it with a certain delay. Under these conditions, we cannot think that all musicians are in time and the wind session is always uncoordinated. The whole is dominated by the sound of cowbells producing a general cacophony.

The overall view, in itself quite grotesque, is perhaps the most effective representation of the emotional feeling of Lanjia Saoras during the celebration of these ceremonies. In other words, although it may however sound like a cliché, this spontaneity is what is habitually understood by 'tribal dance.' Everyone, naturally and effortlessly, relaxes and lets themselves enter into the collective emotional climate thus developed, which in other times would probably have less meaning. The fact that there is no discrimination and that children, not yet able to walk and firmly tied to their mother's breast, are included in the performance indicates how the sense of these communicative manifestations is developed within the family. In conclusion, as a proof of the lack of artificiality of the act, we note that, during the celebration of a *guar*, once the dances have started, it seems no longer possible to stop them. The dancers, tireless, continue to dance throughout the duration of the ceremony and the following night, regardless of the hours or days that it requires.

It is clear that the itinerant aspect, more than the musical performance, is important here. For normally, the Saoras dance in order to escort someone or something. Movement is intended between villages or from one place to another. Just to mention some other occasions, they escort a buffalo to a sacrifice and afterwards they dance on its blood; they dance to fetch a menhir for the *ganuar* or escorting the water carrier to the well at the funeral rite.[8] They can also escort the remains or the ashes of a dead person from the place of death and cremation to the village of origin, zigzagging through the jungle if necessary. Lastly it is quite clear that this gesture has a clear connection with all moments of liminality, and in particular with funeral rituals. The aggressive pace and warrior pantomime clearly has an apotropaic value against real or subtle enemies.[9]

I collected an ancient legend telling of a woman who had lost her husband away from home. As is customary, the body was burnt in one of the cremation sites, but when she came to collect the bones and the ashes it was no longer possible to locate them. So the husband's spectre (transformed in a *kulba*) began to haunt her every night, asking to be taken home. The woman replied that she was not able to find the humble remains. The ghost taught her to dance thus in a circle around the cremation site, so she was able to identify the few bones that were still remaining. After closing the remains in a jug, the wife brought them home with a dancing procession; here she could devote the *guar* to the deceased, sacrificing a buffalo and erecting the megalith. The ghost was pacified and the dance was born: the symbolism of this myth appears abundantly clear.

Conclusion

After the change of economic policy in India (1990-91), great changes have impacted the subcontinent; a boost to modernization has arrived also in Odisha, particularly in the last twenty years. Indigenous traditions are fast disappearing as a result of various factors such as urbanization, globalization and industrialization. Traditional costumes are increasingly rare, and they are worn on very special occasions. Further to that, Christian missions, in the name of evangelization, are significantly contributing to the homogenization of most *ādivāsī* communities. Tensions between converted and unconverted communities were often reported in Saoran territory, also because religion is increasingly used as a tool of social control over the indigenous masses. It is not by chance that among christianised *ādivāsī*s, the wild dance, with weapons and frequent abuse of alcohol is considered a major sin: not so much because it is seen as a dangerous pastime, but because it acts as part of a cultural (tribal) identity that is to be deleted (see also Gundlach 2004: 139-140).

Government policies on tribal affairs have too long wavered between the attempt to preserve the cultures of the jungle and the dynamics of development. Today, despite the existence of a certain awareness about the importance of this intangible cultural heritage, the focus is increasingly moving towards a modernization and integration process of these people, threatening an eventual disintegration of their local identities. It is noteworthy that at the same time, as a sort of repercussion to this deplorable trend of annihilation of *ādivāsī* culture, throughout the state interest in the ‘tribal’ dance is experiencing a moment of genuine revival. People realize that it is an endangered, if not yet vanished, tradition and that it must be protected by some means. So the Government of Odisha and many NGOs organize exhibitions, festivals – like this annual event of Ādivāsī Melā in Bhubaneswar – celebrating the bare survival of indigenous culture. A workforce of tribal origin is often employed in this new dynamic, with the task of mass production, reinterpreting the traditional patterns of dance in a modern way.

These kinds of events have therfore been established in order to fulfil a recreational and entertainment purpose, which generally loses contact or memory itself of the original meaning of the dance. Paradoxically, dance is still recognized as an art form, but its roots seem to melt away in the common oblivion. Today the dancers recite, interpreting with a bitter and forced smile that which was once a funeral march but which has now lost its profound ritual value. These are purely folkloristic performances for national and foreign tourists. On the other hand, this same style conveyed outside the community becomes the desperate cry of the indigenous communities that affirm their right to exist in the contemporary world. The ancient funeral dance, proudly displayed in traditional costumes by indigenous delegations arriving to the metropolis, expresses almost a yearning for identity of an *ādivāsī* culture that is now rapidly disappearing. The sad circle of dancers on a town stage, under neon lights, in front of a clapping audience, seems to recall the dance of Śiva in his circle of fire. The Natarāja put an end to the old world to begin the next cosmic manifestation. This dance in a circle appears to be the funeral march of an ancient culture, the last gasp of a world struggling to survive, while simultaneously marking the beginning of a new era in which the Saoras (like many other minorities) will have to fight for their rights and the acknowledgment of their identity.

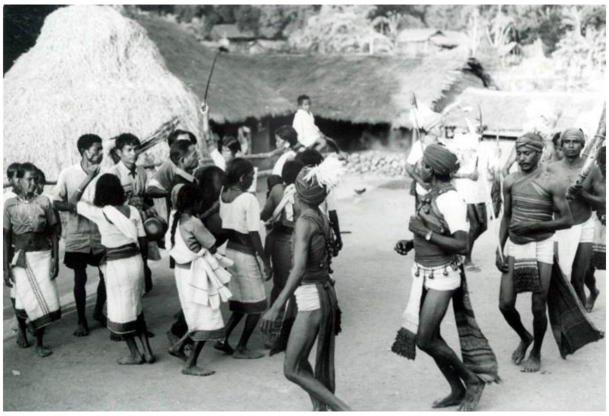

Fig. 3: Regingtal village, funeral dance.

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Notes

[1] As an example, for indigenous people of India, as well as for the Buddhist or Hindu communities or even for mixed groups, usually the houses are facing east or north. This is because the south is universally associated with death, the kingdom of the dead, and at the same time the sun sets to the west. Likewise, in funeral rituals, the pyre for cremation or grave for burial have an opposite orientation, still following the same orientation criteria according to the cardinal points.

[2] To be exact: 104,281,034 ST persons, constituting 8.6 % of the country (Ministry of Tribal Affairs 2013: 1-10).

[3] Or *Kinorai desa* (similarly to the loose Hindi term *deś/deśi:* land, country, people); the country of the dead.

[4] In Odisha, commonly named as *salap* or *salpo*, produced by the fermentation of juice of the sacred plant *Caryota urens* (Beggiora 2016: 193-210)

[5] Also known as *mahul patta*, is a giant creeper of the Indian jungle, *Bauhinia vahlii*.

[6] *Tudum* is a small drum with one skin from one side. Both terms, *tudum* and *debding*, undoubtedly have an onomatopoeic sound. The percussionist and the art of playing that particular instrument are known respectively as *tuduman* and *tudumgal* for the small drum and *debdingan* and *debdingal* for the big one.

[7] When I moved among the villages there was often a crowd of children who accompanied me. I saw that everyone was making strange gestures in the air, and it was explained to me that they mimicked the transport of horns playing at doing a kind of dancing parade.

[8] Here, as in the rest of the Indian world, water establishes a passage occurred in liminality: the ashes of the pyre are sprinkled with water, the *menhir* is ritually washed to consecrate it, etc.

[9] Gongs and horns - the uproar in general - are demon scarers.

INTERVIEW WITH

PAUL HOCKINGS

BY MARINE CARRIN AND HARALD TAMBS-LYCHE

Q: As of today Paul, you must be among the anthropologists who has worked for the longest time in Adivasi studies. How did you come to enter this field? Why did you choose to go to the Nilgiris?

After I had received a solid grounding in both British and American anthropology at the Universities of Sydney, Toronto and Chicago, my mentor at Berkeley recommended that I do fieldwork for my doctorate in the Nilgiri Hills, a small area about the size of Luxembourg that forms part of the Western Ghats in the south of India. This made good sense because there was already a large amount of literature on all sorts of subjects concerning this area; but more than that, there were three closely linked communities on these hills, the Todas, the Kotas, and the Badagas, and of these the Badagas, though by far the largest group, had never been studied. The Todas were already very well-known from the 1906 ethnography of W.H.R. Rivers; the Kotas had been studied for many years by my mentor, David G. Mandelbaum; and ancillary literature was abundant.

Providentially, the American Institute of Indian Studies was founded in the very year I was off to the field, and I became its first grantee. With more than usual foresight, I had put it to Mandelbaum (who was on the relevant committee) that in the future there would be Indian students at American universities who would need fieldwork support, and so the benefits should not be restricted to U.S. citizens (I was British). This argument worked.

I had initially suggested to Mandelbaum that I would like to examine the mass communication processes at the great pilgrimage centre of Madurai (since I had learned Tamil), but he brushed this idea aside with a comment that the place was 'too hot and dusty' and that I would much prefer the mild climate of the Nilgiris. Who wouldn't?—it had been the first hill station that the British had established in India for their relaxation and recuperation, around 1820. So, armed with introductory notes from Mandelbaum and M.B. Emeneau, a Berkeley linguist who had also worked with the Todas and Kotas, I was immediately able to establish myself in the area and start working with informants. I have now been working for half a century on Badaga ethnography, ethnohistory and language. This work has involved interviewing and observing in about 80 villages, which is 20 percent of the total. Everywhere the Badagas have been interested and accommodating.

Q: You are also among the pioneers of modern visual anthropology, but when starting to make ethnographic films, you chose to do so among Irish peasants. Why this apparently rather surprising shift – from the green Nilgiris to the Emerald Isle?

After completing my studies, I was teaching at the University of California in Los Angeles (UCLA) where, after several years, an Ethnographic Film Programme was established in his department by Colin Young (a Scot who later became Director of the National Film and Television School, Buckinghamshire). Young needed an anthropologist to help teach in this new programme, and I was lucky enough to be invited.

After some months of teaching what was then a totally new subject, I teamed up with another professor, Mark McCarty, to make a new style of documentary that we were beginning to call Observational Cinema. We had no restrictions on subject-matter, but did want to meet certain criteria in making the film:

(a) We took along two graduate students from the film programme, Americans whom we wanted to immerse in a tangibly foreign culture while filming: this meant operating in a language other than English.

(b) We also wanted to give ourselves the awkward experience of filming people who used a language that none of us knew (in the event, McCarty and I took lessons in rudimentary Gaelic). This was done purposely so that we would have to grapple with the problem of translation for what we presumed would be a film audience of English-speaking students in the USA.

(c) The film was not to have any old-fashioned commentary, but to rely on on-camera comment and discussion. That was going to call for some inspired editing.

(d) Though Africa could have easily met our requirement for a foreign locale, we wanted to work somewhere that was not too far from a film processing lab, so that we could see rushes from time to time during the shooting and know how we were doing. This would probably have been impossible in Africa, for logistical reasons.

(e) As I had been working closely with peasant farmers in South India, I wanted to interact with peasants in another setting, so that I could both compare and contrast their adaptations to different environments.

We quickly decided that the best locale to meet all these criteria would be the Irish Gaeltacht (like most people, both McCarty and I had distant Irish ancestors, though not from the Gaeltacht). It was 1967, and western parts of Ireland still had pockets with an impoverished, Gaelic-speaking peasant population practising subsistence fishing and farming. Moreover, it was easy to ship exposed 16 mm. film from there to London to have it developed; while just outside Dublin, in Bray, there was a lab that could print rushes for us, that we would travel to look at from time to time.

So I crossed the Atlantic on the Queen Elizabeth, a memorable trip because, just as we were leaving New York, war broke out between Israel and Egypt; and as we arrived in Cork that war came to an end. I rented a car and drove up the west coast for three weeks, from Cork to Donegal, looking for a suitable village to work in. Several places that I examined closely had been studied by Arensberg and Kimball, so that there already was anthropological literature available on them. But these and most other likely villages had one flaw, from a filmmaking viewpoint: they had scattered settlement patterns and were flat. This meant that one couldn't get an establishing shot of the whole village without renting a helicopter, and that was beyond our budget.

When McCarty joined me, we opted for the village of Dunquin (Dún Chaoin) in Co. Kerry, opposite the Blasket Islands, because it offered several attractions:

(a) Everyone spoke Munster Gaelic.

(b) The 180 inhabitants, we were assured, included some'real characters,' a plus in any film.

(c) Directly behind the village were two high hills from which one could see and film the entire village in one sweeping shot; no helicopter needed.

(d) Remarkably, there were several extaordinarily good autobiographies written by members of the tiny community that had existed for centuries on the offshore Great Blasket, until 1953: translated into English, these were as informative as ethnographies. In addition, this maritime peasant society had been well documented by J.M. Synge, and further north by Arensberg and Kimball.

It was only some time later that we realised we had chosen to work in the most westerly village in Eurasia! The editing of the film, which took longer than the shooting, was completed in 1968, and since then the film, titled *The Village*, has been screened in universities and film festivals throughout Europe, North America, China and Japan. We handled the comprehensibility problems brought up by the Gaelic language through a mixture of 70 English subtitles and some voice-overs in English.

In retrospect, the film could be dubbed 'historical' in two senses. As we were making it, we were quite conscious that we were breaking new ground, by putting together sequences of shots that were meaningful without the intervention of any commentary whatever. This was what came to be known as Observational Cinema, a new style of documentary. But in another sense what we recorded was historical, because this 70-minute film was quite possibly the last detailed visual record of peasant society in the British Isles. And this was because of a totally unforeseen event.

While we were filming it was obvious that most of the villagers were surviving on very little cash, and that mainly from small government benefits. Nobody except the local innkeeper (who had once worked as Gloria Swanson's bodyguard) showed any signs whatever of affluence. People did a little fishing if they were not too old, and that land which was not peat-bog could grow a few crops or support sheep. It was a peasant culture still, although one that was quite different from the Badagas. They had traditionally done millet farming, and in recent times had switched to potatoes and small tea plantations. People in the Gaeltacht, on the other hand, were maritime peasants, where fishing had traditionally been quite as important as small-scale farming.

This way of life changed altogether a couple of years later, when David Lean and MGM decided to use this place as the locale for filming *Ryan's Daughter,* a film based loosely on *Madame Bovary* that would star John Mills, Robert Mitchum, Trevor Howard and Sarah Miles. Since the local settlement pattern was a very dispersed one, while MGM wanted this to look like a consolidated east-coast village, they spent over a year building one to plan; and this activity employed local labour exclusively. As a result, many villagers became quite well-off, and so were able to modernise their homes or even build second ones. The film was rather a critical flop, but the unexpected result was that many in the village were now poised to offer accommodation to tourists, the village school now reopened as new children arrived here, and what had been an isolated peasant community now began to look more like the rest of Ireland, as busloads of tourists arrived and professional families moved in because they liked the extraordinary beauty of the landscape and the fact that their children could now be educated in Gaelic. While we were filming there was only one car in the place; today there are many, and commuting to work in a nearby town is commonplace.

Q: In a long career, then, you have contributed to several quite different fields of anthropology. How would you sum up these contributions – how does it all fit together?

Anthropologists in America customarily talk about the 'four fields.' By this they mean Archaeology, Biological Anthropology, Sociocultural Anthropology, and Anthropological Linguistics, in other words, what is taught there in most departments of anthropology. But my own career has been in a rather different quadrivium. From the above recollections it is obvious that I have been concerned both with the ethnography of the Badaga people and with the use of film and still photography in anthropology. As to the latter interest, I have had a central position in visual anthropology over the past quarter-century simply by being the editor of the leading journal in this field, *Visual Anthropology.*

At the time when we made *The Village,* there was considerable opposition among senior American anthropologists to the whole idea of visual anthropology, which many looked on as an abstruse form of classroom entertainment, good for those days when one didn't feel like lecturing, but not to be taken too seriously. So ominous was this attitude then that I determined to make myself useful in other areas too.

Another concern I was mulling over was the whole question of getting some anthropological understanding into the minds of the general public. This interest had begun early in my life when I gave a lot of radio talks in four countries: it was back in the days when the radio talk was still considered a minor literary form. Then in 1970, during a brief stint at MGM, I worked as the research director on a film about palaeo-anthropology, which we called *The Man Hunters.* It was made for television, and in a single night was seen by an estimated 53 million people across North America, on the NBC network.

Long after this the same interest came to fruition again, when I collaborated with Melvin Ember, David Levinson and others to edit a series of encyclopaedias for the general public, and more particularly for undergraduate students: these were the *Encyclopedia of World Cultures, Encyclopedia of Medical Anthropology, Countries and their Cultures, Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology,* and *Encyclopedia of Modern Asia.* Most of these multi-volume series can be found in reference libraries around the world today.

There was yet a fourth area to which I contributed: Dravidian linguistics. Collaborating with Christiane Pilot-Raichoor, a Parisian linguist, we produced the only dictionary of the Badaga language (which is close to Kannada), and also a book of proverbs, prayers, omens and curses.

It's been a full life.