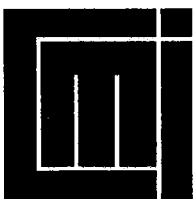


Inner Frontiers: Santal Responses to Acculturation

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Summary:

The Santals who constitute one of the largest communities in India belong to the Austro-Asiatic linguistic group. They have managed to keep their language and their traditional system of values as well. Nevertheless, their attempt to forge a new identity has been expressed by developing new attitudes towards medicine, politics and religion. In the four articles collected in this essay, deal with the relationship of the Santals to some other tribal communities and the surrounding Hindu society.

Sammendrag:

Santalene som utgjør en av de tallmessig største stammefolkene i India, tilhører den austroasiatiske språkgruppen. De har klart å beholde sitt språk og likeså mye av sine tradisjonelle verdisystemer. Ikke desto mindre, har de også forsøkt å utvikle en ny identitet. Dette blir uttrykt gjennom nye ideer og holdninger til medisin, politikk og religion. I de fire artiklene i dette essayet, blir ulike aspekter ved santalene sitt forhold til andre stammesamfunn og det omliggende hindu samfunnet behandlet.

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Introduction

In the four articles collected in this volume, I discuss the relationship of the Santals, the largest tribal group in North-Eastern India, to the surrounding Hindu society. They number about four million people, living chiefly in the three states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa.

In comparing their situation in different states, I have drawn largely on my own fieldwork over a period of some fifteen years. Fieldwork experience also lies behind my comparison with other tribes of the area, the Ho and the Munda.

As for the Birhors, I have only been able to visit them briefly. While the Birhors are hunters and gatherers, the other tribes traditionally subsist on agriculture.

The first essay analyses traditional leadership between headman and priest. Drawing on a comparison between the four tribes, I try to demonstrate how they share a common structure of power and authority, which, however, has taken different historical forms.

First, the authority of the priest is predominant in all four societies. The Mundas show the most elaborate version of the structure. Here, the tribe is divided in moieties, of which the elder is that of the priest, while the chief belongs to the younger of the moieties.

Among the Santals, we find traditionally in each village opposition between headman and priest. But at the inter-village level of the *pargana*, there are chiefs who have no ritual counterpart. They, too, are called *pargana*, and their function is largely judicial. They arbitrate conflicts between villages and local headmen, thus offering an alternative to village leadership.

Nevertheless, the cultural history of these tribes shows traces of the royal model in the legitimation of leadership. This serves to integrate the exogenous institution of inter-village leadership with the indigenous traditions of tribal symbolism.

The second essay deals with the situation of the tribes during the colonial period. It analyses the tribal movements which emerged from 1820 to 1855, culminating in the Santal rebellion. For the Santals, this movement has been important in promoting reform of tribal values in the face of Hindu influence.

The awakening of tribal consciousness implicit in the rebellion allowed for the elaboration of symbolic responses to acculturation. Instead of following the lower castes in claiming a higher status within the Hindu hierarchy of castes, the Santals have tried to reassert their tribal values through revivalist movements. Nevertheless, in the different states of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, the Santals have adjusted to dominant caste society in different ways. These differences are explained by the various influences acting upon them. For instance, Christianisation, a determinant factor in Bihar, is paralleled by a much stronger Hindu influence in Bengal, where Hindu Santal relations were less dominated by conflict.

Santals thus have either closer or more distant relationship to their neighbours, according to the states in which they live. Still, the concept of "foreigner" remains pejorative. *Diku*, "foreigner", became, during the period of British domination, synonymous with invader or intruder, not only for the Santals but also for the neighbouring Munda-speaking tribes.

This concept, moreover, points to a paradox in Santal thought; closeness and remoteness become one and the same.

This paradox is the theme of the third essay. As an example, Santals consider incest and sexual relationships to foreigners as equivalent transgressions, and use one term for both. The excessive remoteness of the foreigner and the excessive closeness of kin are thus equated in the same taboo.

In the last article, we again deal with the synthesis of indigenous thought and external influence. Here, the Norwegian missionary, P.O. Bodding, trying to map out the categories of indigenous medicine, compiled from Santal informants a list of diseases and their remedies. This list, which forms part of the Santal archives at Oslo University Library, shows an interesting contrast to classification elicited from my own field material. Whereas the list implies *associative thought*, my data show a *hierarchical* pattern of *taxa*. This contrast relates directly to the arguments raised by Goody (1977), Hallpike (1979) and others regarding the nature of primitive thought and the influence of writing on mental processes. Aiming, in both cases, at rationality, we see how the symbolic dimension remains important; moreover, foreign influence in fact produces a relapse into irrationality. Thus Hinduized Santal *gurus* neglect traditional medicine in developing new forms of ritual.

Acculturation, as it appears in these essays, cannot be described as the adoption of foreign values. Rather, in adapting to new situations the tribal populations develop and reformulate their thought and institutions in ever new forms.

Hinduization among the Santals, moreover, is not the adoption of a single set of ideas and values. While the symbolism of the royal model evokes the idea of a lost kingdom, ascetic ideals — quite a different strand of Hindu thought — has influenced tribal priesthood. These influences belong to the Tantric rather than the orthodox schools of Hinduism, while the Hinduized *gurus* are influenced — quite differently — by the devotional traditions of *bhakti*, “devotion”.

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Gods, ancestors and men: From authority to power in four Munda tribes

The relationship of authority and power in Munda-speaking tribes¹ is complex because it involves two sets of concepts: one related to the native concepts of power and authority and the second to the notion of Hindu kingship as a model of the legitimation of power.

In order to trace these two sets of concepts let me pose a question: does the adoption of a royal model always follow the state formation pattern which clearly emerges from S. Sinha's study (1962) of *kshatriyazation*² among the Bhumij? The aim of this paper is to show how the Munda-speaking tribes' situation, even if they seem to have partly adopted a royal model at one period of their history, is different from the Bhumij.

It is not easy to figure out the concepts of authority and power as far as the Munda speaking tribes are concerned. This understanding involves a series of levels, which may be illustrated by the four tribes that I shall compare: the Birhor, the Mundas, the Hos and the Santals.³

The information on these four neighbouring societies is not completely homogenous, since I have studied only briefly the Mundas and the Hos, though I have devoted some years to the study of the Santals in Bihar, Orissa and Bengal. As far as the Birhor are concerned, I rely on second-hand information (S.C. Roy 1925).

¹ These tribes belong to the Northern Munda group which numbers around 6 million people, living in the states of Bihar, Bengale and Orissa.

² This expression refers to the process by which a group becomes Hindu through adopting the values of the *ksatriya* who are, as it is well known, the second highest group in the caste hierarchy of India. Unlike the Brahmans who are vegetarian, the *ksatriya* are meat-eaters.

³ Each of these tribes speak their own language. However, the Birhor, Ho and Santal languages belong the Austro-Asiatic family of Munda languages. In daily life situations (markets, fairs, hunting parties) the native speakers of these different groups converse with each other. In the transcription of Santal terms I follow P.O. Boddling. (See Carrin-Bouez, 1986)

The Birhor priest

We shall start from the Uthlu Birhor who are still hunters and gatherers and who seem to have preserved their original organization. According to S.C. Roy (1978:30) the Bihors do not distinguish between the notions of power and authority. Each *tanda* or temporary settlement of Birhor patrilineal *kili* or clan has a priest who is also regarded as a secular headman. This man who might be the clan's eldest member is called the *naya* and as S.C. Roy says (op.cit), "... his position is only that of a chief among equals". The *naya* represents religious authority and important decisions such as shifting the camp rest on him. Moreover, he is also responsible for carrying the gods of the *tanda* in a special bambo basket which stands as the collective sacred place since the *tanda*, being composed of temporary huts, has no sanctuary.

The second function of the *naya* is to offer sacrifices to the forest deities. Without these rituals the hunt will not be successful. The *naya* also has the power to neutralize the evil eye of women threatening the hunters. The *naya* does not exercise his moral authority alone, he is helped by the elders of different clans. They also meet with him in order to settle conflicts. As a traditional gift, the *naya* receives the neck of every animal killed during the hunt. In Birhor society, the *naya* only is a priest; he appoints, however, a messenger in order to gather the people for the hunt.

Our basic hypothesis, which we shall test by comparing the Bihors with the other Munda tribes, is that for the former the opposition between authority and power does not parallel a distinction between sacred and secular values. In their small social groupings, the two notions are not really opposed to each other since the control over men and spirits are seen as very similar activities. But another contrast, similar to our familiar dichotomy of authority and power, is present when the Birhor distinguish between two types of religious functions: the *naya's* authority is opposed to the *mati's* power: the *mati* is a kind of shaman who is supposed to reveal the will of the spirits. The position of the *mati* differs fundamentally from that of the *naya*. The *mati* is elected by his villagers on the grounds of his ability to become possessed by the spirits. The function is to discover which particular *bhut* is causing any sickness. Therefore he is directly connected with sacredness of the evil kind, the counterpart of which is precisely the positive authority of the *naya* priest. Nevertheless, the dichotomy of authority and power expressed, respectively, by chief and priest as represented by the elders, is not replicated in the moral authority of the clan. Through the clan chief this is expressed in ritual as well as secular matters: he has to perform periodical sacrifices to the clan deities,

a rule which is observed in all the four tribes, since they share more or less the same kind of totemistic system.⁴

But unlike the other tribal clan chiefs, the Birhor clan elders may possess some specific powers ascribed to them by the mythic tradition of their origin. Let us again quote S.C. Roy (1978:31): "the geographical situation of some clans have endowed them with specific magical powers: the Khudr Hembrom have powers over the weather." This geographical situation recalls the mythic value all the four tribes attach to the symbolical dimension of the place of origin, generally a *buru*, a "hill" in the clan stories. The names of the clan deities controlled by the clan chiefs is the same again among the Bihors, the Hos and the Santals: they are the *orak'* (*owa* in Ho language) *bonga ko*, "house-gods" from the hill. Some clans among the Birhor are allowed the mythic privilege of carrying the basket. This makes them almost equal to the *tanda* priest.

The concept of the village founder

Unlike the Birhor, the three other tribes have settled in villages and cultivate rice and cereals. Perhaps as a result of the process of sedentarization, the concept of the village founder is particularly important among these groups. This concept is expressed in the megalithic burial ground, *sasan*, of the Munda and the Ho. In these two societies, one must belong to the *kili* (clan) of the village founder in order to be entitled to have one's bones deposited in the burial ground after death. The notion of the village founder reaches its fullest sociological pertinence in Munda societies where villages may be mono-clanic⁵ while they are almost always

⁴ The same clan names are found in different tribes: for example, the *murum*, "deer" clan is shared by the Birhor and the Santal. This is perhaps the oldest clan often associated with priesthood in ritual texts, such as festival's songs. Furthermore, we find mention of the Hembrom, "tortoise" clan name among all the four tribes. Though differences exist between the different societies regarding e.g. the food-taboos referring to particular clans, we still find evidence of similar principles: superiority of the elder over the younger, cult to the deity of the ancestral hill and exclusion of women from totemistic cults.

⁵ The Munda do not permit other clans than that of their founder (the *khunkatti* group) to settle in their mono-clanic villages; if outsiders come for work, they are not allowed to buy Munda lands and they cannot have their bones buried in the founder clan's cemetery after their death. The outsiders and their descendents were buried in a separate *sasan*.

multi-clanic in Ho⁶ or Santal⁷ areas. It is also a unique feature of Munda society that they have preserved an original system of ritual moieties or *khunt*, as shown in the following diagram: Supremacy of priest over chief among the four tribes.

Nomadic Birhor

mono-clanic temporary settlement;
its priest (*naya*) also headman: carries the gods' basket;
positive sacredness related to ancestors;
supernaturally elected *naya*;
in hunting, *naya's* authority balanced by the collective body of clan's elders.

Munda

mono-clanic village;
its priest (*pahan*) descends from the elder of a pair of siblings seen as founders of the village, the chief descending from the younger;
priest's and chief's lineages form moieties (*khunt*);
priest's office transmitted to the eldest son of the eldest sub-lineage;
village's priest bestows fertility on women;
village's priest is rainmaker.

Ho

multi-clanic village;
dihuri (priest) belongs to any clan;
chief (*manki, mukhia*) as one of the richest men in the village;
affinal links are important for leadership;
through intensive segmentation gives continuous formation of new clans;
prestige competition (of the economic kind — marriage prestations) of affinally related clans.

⁶ For an analysis of the Ho funeral ceremony, including the erection of the memorial stone, see M. Carrin-Bouez, 1977.

⁷ For a more detailed analysis of the Santal clan system and priesthood, see M. Carrin-Bouez, 1986 a.

Santal

multi-clanic villages;

naeke (village priest), traditionally belongs to the *murmu* clan, represents the world of mythic ancestors and is responsible for women's fecundity;⁸ *manjhi* (village's headman) descends directly from the village's founder who was the first headman, he offers sacrifice to his ancestors (the line of village's chiefs) on behalf of its local community;

religious authority of priest and power of headman balanced by inter-villages tribal meetings.

Munda and Ho situations

So, while the *kili* or patrilineal clan is found in all the four groups, this unit is further divided into two ritual moieties in Munda society. The *khunt* system is central to the understanding of the relation of chief to priest in that the elder moiety is called the priest's or *pahan khunt* while the younger one is the chief's or *munda khunt*. The first function is represented by the principle of priesthood, a fact which evokes the brahman's superiority over the *kshatrya*. The ritual function of the priest, however, does not depend on his purity as in Hindu society but on his symbolic efficacy, while the tribal chief is more a *primus inter pares* than a king. Transcending the dichotomy priest/chief, the moral authority in Munda villages rests with the *khuntkatti* group, a cluster of households sharing the same *kili* or *sept*. At the death of the village founder, the eldest son becomes the head of the several sub-units of his clan. In multi-clanic villages, the priest is selected from the village founder's line and the munda or chief can either belong to the same clan or to a junior clan. In every case, the senior/junior distinction is important. Even if the village was established generations ago, the priest is considered the descendant of the founder who placed the stones representing the deities in the sacred grove. When he daubs these stones with turmeric he shows reverence to the village deities. In that respect, the priest is identified with the ancestor and has to look after his co-villagers in order to prevent any breach of taboo which could defile the sacred grove and provoke the wrath of the deities. Consequently, he is responsible for good crops and the wellbeing of his community. The same definition can be applied to the Ho priest — the *dihuri* — whose origin was the hunting

⁸ The idea of women's fecundity expresses the continuity of the patrilineal lineage. During some rituals, the village priest distributes flowers to women as symbols of fecundity: the *mohua* (*Bassia Latifolia* L.). It is also true that he is able to do so because he is married.

priest, a function which evokes the symbolic association of the Birhor priest with the forest world and the hunt. As in the other groups, the *deuri* (*dihuri*) attends the deities of the sacred grove and offers sacrifices to the chief deity of the village, called Dessauli.

However, if we compare the Munda and Ho cases, we find that the multi-clanic Ho village is a confederation of Munda villages where economic and ritual competition exist between the different *kili* or clans. Therefore, the Ho *manki* or village headman does not enjoy the same authority as his Munda counterpart. This competition can be observed in marriage exchanges⁹ which are more important among the Munda or Santal and thus involve much more circulation of wealth and cattle. Among the Ho, the superiority of one *kili* over another is not guaranteed through mythic powers as is the case for the Birhor clans, which confer ritual privileges but depend on economic superiority. Perhaps as a consequence the clan units seem less important to the Ho than the funeral rituals which (like marriage rituals) involve a heavy circulation of goods.

Besides the fact that they share the same kind of sacred spatial organization, a sacred grove where the village deities are and a *sasan* or burial ground, the Munda and Ho differ in one important respect; while the religious authority of the village founder is the prime principle for the Munda, the Ho allow economic competition giving superiority to the clan which is the best donor. The priest, in both cases, remains superior to the headman, while the former is superior to the witch-doctor. Still, differences arise which can be explained by the contrasting role of the clan elders. The latter exercise more powerful influence in Ho villages in that they achieve higher ritual status by proving good donors at marriages and funerals.

The situation in Santal society

Among the Santal, the village institutions of priesthood and leadership are assumed by the *naeke* (village priest) and by the *manjhi* (village headman) respectively. But, unlike the other groups under comparison, the Santal have developed a wider range of village functionaries. The *naeke* or village priest attends to the sacred grove (*jaheer*) deities, but has an assistant, the *kudam naeke*, backdoor priest whose role is secondary; he takes upon himself the impurity of sacrifice when he beheads the sacrificial animals. While such a dichotomy between pure and impure priesthood reflects the

⁹ For an analysis of Ho matrimonial strategies and economic exchanges, see S. Bouez, 1985.

opposition existing in the Hindu world between brahman and low caste pujari, I postulate that this fact, though considered an influence of Hinduization, does not change the meaning attached to the function of priesthood in Santal society. As in the three other tribes, the Santal priest is identified with the ancestor and acts out his role in the flower festival. But another difference emerges: the *manjhi*, or Santal village headman, is more respected in Santal society than in the other Munda tribes. This is clear from Santal stories about *colon*, "tribal law"¹⁰ and is underlined by another fact: in every Santal village, a *manjhi than*, "headman sacred seat" is a shed where the ancestors of the actual headman are worshipped. Each generation of headmen is represented by a stone that the present headman sometimes anoints with turmeric. Suspects lay down their oaths in front of the *manjhi than* when their cases are considered by the village assembly, over which the *manjhi* presides. The *manjhi* is helped by a *jog-manjhi* or assistant who is in charge of the village youth and has to present the pollution of village deities in cases of illicit sexual relationships.

The importance of the headman's function in Santal society can be explained by the fact of an elaborated judicial code¹¹ by the existence of assemblies operating mostly at inter-village level, aimed at controlling the headman's authority. Here, a slight difference prevails among the Munda, Ho and Santal society. The Santal have long forgotten their original megalithic culture and now immerse a few bones of their dead in the river. This symbolical dispersion of the bones seems opposed to the careful collection of village founder descendants in Ho and Munda villages where in multi-clanic villages, each clan has its own range of funeral stones. In Santal society, the final dispersion of the bones — which are, however, kept for a certain time under the family roof — evokes the scattering of the kinship groups. The kinship-based groups are still connected with a place of origin conceptualized as a place from which each group of ancestors came. The origin of the twelve original Santal clans is mythical and the migration of ancestors led to another consequence: the segmentarization of the twelve original clans into 160 sub-clans. This segmentarization is reflected at the religious level where each sub-clan becomes a cult group which identifies itself with a deity and a place of origin. Unlike the other groups, the place of origin is not represented by the village itself (as

¹⁰ The Santal have elaborated a long mythical interpretation of the respective concepts of *colon*, "tribal law" inspired by the ancestors and *bicar*, "coercive laws" imposed by the Hindus, see M. Carrin-Bouez, 1986.

¹¹ For a presentation of documented law-suits which took place in Santal areas of Bihar, see W. Archer (1984).

emphasized in the village founder principle) but is asserted to have been lost and is symbolically represented by an uncultivated spot between the forest and the village. In this case, those responsible for kinship-based cults form a corporate group having authority in secular as well as religious matters.

Let us now analyze the symbolical role of the village priest which is more or less identical among the Ho, the Munda and the Santal. Surprisingly, his role is not in contradiction with that of the Birhor *naya* who holds the functions of both priesthood and leadership. If the village priest retains some of his characteristics in the other societies which have developed an independent leadership, this might mean that the authority of the priest is an endogenous factor which gains its meaning from its roots in the original tribal universe. The tribal priest pertains to the ancestors realm and this identity appears especially in the spring festival of wild flowers and fruits, common to the three tribes, and where the village priest throws consecrated water on village women in order to ensure their fertility.

Besides this identity, at certain times shared with his wife (recalling thus the ancestor pair), the village priest has a special affinity with the mountain god. This endows him with two kinds of powers: he can perform sacrifices for a successful hunt (Birhor), a function vested in a special hunt priest among the Munda and the Santal. He is also a rain-maker and performs rain-making ceremonies on the top of a hill called *buru* in the Munda, Ho and Santal languages. In Birhor society we have seen that some clan elders are rain-makers, a power which makes them more or less equal to the *tanda* priest. This shows that the Birhor represent an anterior state of the system: among them, priest's, headman's and clan elder's authority is one. The human world is perceived as being in continuity with the ancestor's world; the continuum is not broken and as a consequence, there is no social sphere of power which can counteract the moral authority of the priest. In the case of the other Munda groups who have known inter-clan conflicts (Munda/Santal) — and economic and prestige contests (Ho) — the social sphere has detached itself from the continuum as secular leadership has detached itself from priesthood. While we observe that the definition of the priest is still identical in the four tribes, the Santal, with more clan fights, have developed a more segmented clan system: at this stage, the subdivision of the twelve original clans in numerous sub-clans has given grounds for rivalry and factions. Therefore, it is not surprising that they have developed a more elaborate leadership which itself offers locus for contradiction. The institution of headman, though embedded in ritual (the cult offered to the headman's ancestors who were generally the previous headmen of the village), provides also individual talent: a good *manjhi*, "headman", knows

how to refer to the Santal judicial code and how to manipulate the suspected culprits through oaths and ordales. He knows the oratory art which confers on him power and prestige. A good headman, however, is not a man of intrigue. Thus a Santal saying tells us that: "the headman's wife cannot be a witch"; in other words, the headman enjoys a benevolent worldly power which is the opposite of the shady power of witches, those who, having died by accident, have never become good ancestors.

But the "good powers" of priest and chief have to balance the shady power personified in the social sphere by the *mati* (Birhor, Munda), the *deonwa* (Ho) and the *ojha* (Santal).¹² They manipulate the power of the underworld and are dreaded as magicians even if they do not possess any religious authority. These magicians and witch doctors obtain their power at an inter-village level where they are not controlled by the priest or the headman of their own village. Again, we see that an independent sphere of power exists only in the sedentarized tribes and particularly among the Santal, where the sub-clan factions are more important. Rivalries between these factions frequently oppose elder and younger brother and can provoke splits at the village level. In this particular case, the rebellious faction no longer recognizes the moral power and authority of the priest and headman: they secede and found at least a separate *tola*, or a separate village. They elect a new headman while the deities often possess one of them who thus becomes their priest. To avoid such extreme situations, the headman of the Santal village can refer to the inter-village level institutions.

The inter-village institutions or the rise of the secular sphere

The inter-village level is characterized by institutions of two kinds: those that are tribal in their origins and those introduced by tribal kings or by colonial rulers.

Among the Birhor, this wider organization appears only in the inter-*tanda* association which groups different settlements for hunting. In these associations, the *naya* and elders of the different groups act to prevent disputes. In Munda society, this wider organization is called *parha*¹³ and has served inter-villages hunting parties. Each *parha* had a chief and a flag; Munda stories tell us that conflicts between *parha* were mostly disputes about the sharing of wild game. More recently the Chotanagpur raja, who

¹² For an account of the Santal *ojha* and his relationship to popular Hinduism, see M. Carrin-Bouez, 1986 a.

¹³ For a precise analysis of the term *parha*, see J. Hoffman (1950).

was an Hinduized tribal chief, introduced the *patti* system in the Munda country (S.C. Roy 1970:55): the *patti* chief was called a *manki* and was elected by the headmen of twelve villages. They had a judicial role in land conflicts and were judges in cases of theft and breach of sexual taboos. Each federation of villages was still called *parha*, but later on the chief of these *parha* was appointed by the raja to whom he paid a heavy annual tribute. The areas where this system prevailed were called Bhuinhari areas (mostly in Chotanagpur, Singbhum and Keonjhar). Later on, judicial authority was added to the executive authority of the *parha* chief and his council was known as the *panchayat*. The original meaning of the *parha* had become pervaded by the impact of the feudalistic relationship between the *raja* and the *parha* chief. Consequently, the latter was called the *parha raja* even if the role was sometimes held by the Munda headman or the *parhan* priest of the Munda village. (S.C. Roy 1970). As the *parha raja* started to claim as his due the customary gifts that he was given by the twelve village headmen placed under his control, some Munda villagers preferred to retreat to the jungle rather than to submit to the *parha raja*. The situation became much worse when the raja of Chota Nagpur gave Muslim traders — whose goods he was unable to pay for — rights in several Munda villages. This, among other events, provoked the rising of Mundas and Oraons around 1811 and 1817.¹⁴

The inter-village organization of the Ho shows the same development as that of the Munda, while the Santal had a more elaborate system. Thus their organization was able to survive the imposition of inter-village administrative institutions by the Hindu raja (in the feudatory states of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj) in Orissa or by the Hinduized raja in Bihar. The federation of twelve Santal villages was similar to the Munda and Ho *parha*, but was called *pargana* from the name of a Muslim administrative unit. The headmen of the twelve villages concerned used to elect a *parganait* who had juridical power and also represented the federation of villages against outsiders. The *pargana* system is still found in some Santal areas. Thus, in North Orissa, I noted that the *parganait* was playing a political role in the modern world as being an M.L.A., while in Bihar political roles are filled mostly by non-traditional leaders from a westernized elite.¹⁵ According to the Santal tradition, the *parganait* is

¹⁴ In order to understand the tribal movements, it is necessary to refer to the economic transformations and administrative reforms which have been introduced in tribal areas by the foreign rulers. See K.S. Singh, 1978.

¹⁵ This elite has sometimes opposed the traditional institutions in rejecting, for example, the use of tribal language, and trying to impose the teaching of English in tribal schools.

helped by a *des manjhi*, "territorial chief" and a *karji*, or "messenger"; these two dignitaries are to report conflicts to the *parganait* who tries to solve the problems according to traditional law. The villages under one *parganait* still provide a basis for annual hunting parties. Then, the *parganait* and his subordinates have occasion to hold an extraordinary session where every man from any clan can freely submit his case to the meeting. This kind of tribal court has succeeded in keeping apart from the influence of the rajas and has played an important role in cases of illegitimate unions between Santal and Hindu people or in witchcraft affairs. According to the *lo bir sendera colon*, "burnt forest hunting custom", any culprit has the right to report his case to the *parganait* who can go against any accusation pronounced at the village level by any *manjhi* (headman) or council of elders. Before making his decision, the *parganait* might submit the culprit to an oath or an ordeal; he can also give him a chance on the payment of a fine.¹⁶

In Santal society, a more day-to-day assembly might interfere with the headman/ *pargana* hierarchy: it is the *kulhi durup'*, or "sitting in the village street" which can refer to village or inter-village meetings as well. In this kind of meeting, all are said to be equal to everyone else, and statutory distinctions based on age, wealth, title or clan prestige are not supposed to interfere. Anyone who knows how to argue can "speak" *galmarao*, in behalf of his co-villagers. Practically, these "popular" meetings (unknown in Ho and Munda villages) give the audience a unique opportunity to challenge or confirm village and inter-village hierarchy. As one of my Santal informants used to say: "the Santal have tried to turn to their advantage the *pargana* system in inventing a kind of democracy, the *kulhi durup'* where everyone can try to tie with his speech the power of a *parganait*."

Some hints of a royal model

While we have just seen that the Santal have tried to prevent their *parganait* from getting too much power and have perhaps become tantalized towards sanscritization, let us return to the possible evidence of a royal model in Munda society. In Chotanagpur, certain descendants of the elected chiefs had ambitions of rising in the social scale. They became

See M. Carrin-Bouez, 1986 b.

¹⁶ The *parganait* (sometimes called *pargana*) takes a share of this fee. He is also given a feast by the culprit.

hinduized and formed marital connections with families who were recognized as Hindu *ksatriya*. Consequently, the *raja* of Chotanagpur invited Brahmans to attend his court and tried to exhibit symbols of Hindu royalty. Correlatively, he gave *jagirdar* land tenure rights in Munda villages to Muslim traders. But the Ho were relatively unaffected by such oppression as their lands had already been placed under British protection. In Mayurbhanj, where the *raja* was a Hindu who used Santal men for military and hunting purposes, the impact of a royal model is expressed through the institution of *parganait*. As I observed in 1978, the *parganait* has become an hereditary function (in Bihar, he is elected and is enthroned like a king): he wears a turban, carries an umbrella and has his feet washed by the headmen of his jurisdiction. We may conclude that the royal symbolism serves as a legitimation process which tries to integrate an exogenous institution of inter-village level chief with tribal symbolism. However, in the Santal case the *parganait* could not dominate the village headmen because, as we have seen, his power was balanced by the traditional meeting (the *kulhi durup'* and the *lo bir sendera* sessions). Therefore, the process of hinduization by the adoption of *ksatriya* values was much weaker in Santal than in Munda society. Nevertheless, the inter-village level opened a locus for a new social order where individual modern leaders could operate. Not surprisingly, the charismatic leaders of tribal rebellions were not traditional chiefs, but ordinary village people inspired by the tribal deities,¹⁷ who were able to express the new social needs of the people.

The secular character of the charismatic leaders broke with the previous social structure where religious authority and secular power were one, though distributed among three main instances: religious authority of the village priest, secular power of village headman and mediator of the elders. Besides, the religious authority of the Brahmans invited by the king of Chotanagpur to his court did not affect the village people; they, rather, were influenced by *vaishnavite gosains* preaching against caste hierarchy.

Thus, despite his ambitions, the hinduized tribal king did not succeed in offering a new set of values to his people. He was denying his own origin. In this context, the king failed to achieve moral authority in the tribal world dominated by the ancestor's shadows.

This last point leads us to the following comment: in tribal areas, religious authority cannot be endorsed through Hindu values since they

¹⁷ The cult of tribal deities inspired revivalist movements like the Kherwar movement 1871-1880 or the Santal rebellion (1855-1857). They contrast with reform movements whose leaders were hinduized, such as the Jatra Oraon movement (1915-1922).

represent an exogenous power. As we have seen, in the Munda speaking groups authority is represented by the village priest and the headman because they are descendants of the village founder. The idea of territory is not associated with kingship but with the process of clearing the forest in order to establish villages. Thus, the principle of descent pervades the symbolical expression of authority. Power is subordinated to that authority which is seen in terms of identity with ancestors.

For the tribal mind, the outsiders could not make a king out of a tribal chief, since this process obliged the "new" king to deny his tribal origin by marrying in Rajput families, thus offending the tribal ancestors and deities.

It is because they never accepted the hinduized kings as their rulers that the charismatic leaders of the Munda, Ho and Santal rebellions promised their followers that they would recreate the "real" tribal kingdom as it was believed to have existed in ancient times.

The tribal people could think power in terms of kingship: they also wanted a kingdom because the conception of tribal chiefs appointed at the inter-village level had weakened the authority of tribal priests.

The gradual undermining of endogenous authority had given some credit to the symbol of the exogenous power, the idea of a kingdom, and later on the political project of a tribal state (Jharkand) and not of an hinduized kingdom as in the Bhumij case (S. Sinja 1962).

This process was, strangely enough, the reverse of the legitimation process observed, for example, by Keonjhar kings who used to take as *ista devata*, "chosen deities", the tribal deities whose bronze effigy was kept in the forest by Hill Bhuiya chiefs and brought back to the palace every year.¹⁸

Whereas the tribal people (except the Birhor who were not affected by this process) drew the inspiration of a lost kingdom from the deformed image of the hinduized king, the Hindu *raja* of tribal areas had to fortify his power by having his deity kept by tribal people. While the hinduized tribal king needed a fictive genealogy to ensure his claims, the Hindu *raja* selected his chosen deity among the most remote outsiders of his feudal kingdom, the tribal people.

In this interface situation, the logic underlying the symbolical efficacy of power does not rest on the opposition of pure and impure but on the dichotomy of indigenous and foreign concepts. In this respect, religious mediators like Brahmans or tribal custodians of a royal deity serve only to convey a message: the action of a foreign mediator, whether officially

¹⁸ On this last point, see H. Kulke, 1976.

admired (Hindu royal model) or despised (tribal legitimation of Hindu king), is necessary to encode symbolically the legitimation of power.

In fact, to understand properly the meaning of hinduization through a royal model (or the idea of a lost kingdom) in the case of the Munda, the Ho and the Santal, we have to give up the idea of the Hindu world as carrying higher ethical values than the tribal one. Such a point of view creates the bias of seeing power and secular values naturally attached to the tribal world and consequently implies that hinduization is the way to turn this power into authority. We hope to have demonstrated that for tribal people, authority belongs to the tribal (endogenous) pole of their representations, while power is associated to the alien institutions. This fact is directly expressed by the function of the Birhor *mati* who has control over Hindu gods in order to prevent them doing harm in his native tribal community.

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Differential responses to acculturation among the Santal

The precolonial situation of tribal India is not well known. Some regions emerged from obscurity in the sixteenth century and some tribes, such as the Bhils or Kols, were politically recognized by the Mughal empire. As a pre-condition of the formation of states, the Gond, Nagbansis and Chero chiefs encouraged the settlement of non-tribal communities such as the Kurmi, which, as K. Singh (1978:1225) notes, possessed a superior agricultural technology that "alone could generate the agricultural surplus that the new states required". As authors such as S. Sinha (1965) and C. von Fürer-Haimendorf (1982), acknowledge, the new states acted as agents of sanskritization.¹⁹ A number of castes, such as artisan communities, as well as Brahmans who received grants of land in exchange of ritual services, came and settled in the tribal areas. Thus, in central India, the tribal peoples were no longer living isolated but had economic relationships with Hindu castes.

Later on, colonial rule developed a policy of protection of the tribes as ethnic communities: the tribes needed a special jurisdiction. This was the paternalistic rule of British administrators. Their ideology led the administrators to plan a series of reforms: agrarian laws and protection of tribal leadership. No doubt this system was established in order to pacify such tribes as the Bhil (1825) or to put an end to tribal customs such as the human sacrifice or female infanticide in Kond areas from 1840-1865 (E.Boal 1982).

With the building of roads to export the products from plantations, the colonial system put an end to the relative independence of the tribal

¹⁹ In 1952, M.N. Srinivas stressed that the Coorgs from South India were trying to meliorate their status in the caste system by adopting Hindu values of purity. The adoption of a vegetarian diet and the worship of the higher Hindu gods were included in these new practices. Moreover, the Coorgs requested Brahmans to perform their religious duties. M.N. Srinivas introduced the concept of sanskritization to name the process by which a low caste tries to reform its practices in order to claim a higher status in the hierarchy of castes.

economy which was suddenly chained to the market economy (Cf: K. Sing 1978:1226).²⁰

The Santal — one of the major tribes of India — were massively engaged in the colonial process since they were used as labour force in clearing forest tracts such as the Rajmahal Hills in Bihar. Massive Santal migration towards this area had the consequence of weakening the clan and the territorial organization on which tribal leadership was based. As the land system of the tribal population was later integrated by the agrarian reform, the traditional headmen (*manjhi*) and territorial chiefs (*pargana*) were recognized by the officers. The colonial administration took some measures of protection against alienation of land (1833) or laws against usury (1873).

Tribal movements

The development of industries based on the exploitation of mineral resources made the tribal areas advanced in terms of modern development. Meanwhile, the missionaries were very active. Their activity can be understood at two different levels. The first was guided by evangelization: the missionaries tried to impose their puritanical ethic and to reform the marriage system and sexual code of the tribal populations; marriage became an individual affair rather than an exchange between kinship groups. Second, in addition to these ideological concerns, the missionaries worked out with the administrators the restoration of land to tribals, sometimes guiding peasant struggles against Hindu landowners. The first tribal movements that may be considered as symbolic answers against absorption in caste society occurred around 1820: Chero disturbances in Chotanagpur 1820, revolt of the Gonds 1819, Khond resistance to the abolition of Meriah sacrifice 1830.

The second period of tribal movements corresponds to the development of colonial administration. The tribal movements which occurred in this period developed a religious and political dimension, such as the Kherwar movement (1871-1880) and Santal rebellion (1855-1857). These movements were religious in their expression but had a political dimension. The Kherwars abstained from certain kinds of food and from alcoholic beverage. They consulted Hindu gurus in life-crises. As a matter of fact, the Kherwar

²⁰ I subscribe on the whole to K. Singh's schema of colonial transformations. Nevertheless, I think that the case of the Santal, whom I have been studying for the last ten years, is particularly complex as they are one of the major tribes of India. Moreover, they are an encysted society within the neighbouring society of caste.

movement was not too important in the Santal Parganas where missionary educational activity was more intense. Another point deserves mentioning: the Santal were cultivating good land while as J. Mac Dougall remarks that "by contrast, in Southwest, they were outnumbered, the Southwest was distinctive in one respect, the remoteness of the British officers" (J. Mac Dougall 1978: 59). The Santal movement led by Sidho and Kanhu in 1855 was partly due to the mass deportations that the Santal had endured since 1832. Despite the protective administration which was prevalent in the district of the Damin i-Koh, the Santal had been subjugated to an administrative system where the *jagirdars*, those who held land-tenure rights, were Hindu and were trying to get access to tribal lands. The exactions of money-lenders and police officers exhausted the tribal people, who were forced to pay a very high rate of interest (K. Datta 1940: 5). When they could not pay, they were forced into labour. The Santal insurrection itself had a strong religious overtone. The tribal deities appeared directly to the chiefs of the movement, who were not traditional chiefs, but young leaders. The movement took on considerable dimensions, and expressed resentful feelings against all kinds of non-tribals, *diku*, "aliens". The British were obliged to declare martial law and the movement was violently repressed until 1856. Following the Santal, other tribes were involved in similar movements, but their leaders were not equally inspired by tribal deities and by the revitalization of tribal culture: they were mostly reformists like the Jatra Oraon (1915-1922).

The last period of tribal movements was marked by the participation of tribes in the national struggle. The influence of Gandhian social workers was noticeable among the Bhil, the Ghond and the Ho. The influence started the process of politicisation of the tribals, and generated tribal leaders who did not care for the assertion of tribal identity, but engaged themselves in the national political sphere. Of course, as we shall see, this situation was not definitive, and can also be explained by the impact of Christian education which contributed to the development of an egalitarian ideal reflected in political consciousness.²¹

Moving towards peasant society

Around 1910, tribal leaders developed the ideal of egalitarianism, promoting the survival of the tribe as an entity rather than engaging

²¹ In this respect, the influence of Gandhian social workers has also contributed to the rise of political consciousness and spread of democratic ideals among tribals.

themselves in national politics. This is explained by the fact that contradiction between tribals and non-tribals developed earlier than intra-ethnic contradiction, which burst out later under the pressure of tribal elites.

On a more general level, the tribal society, obliged to adapt to the new colonial economy, was replicating the peasant/caste society. Sanskritization, as an expression of upward mobility, became a movement which included the tribal villagers who had not received tribal education and could not develop a tribalist ideal. The first hint of sanskritization in Santal society was the *Saph hor* movement 1905, which tried to adopt some of the Hindu values. Some Santals put on the sacred thread and a fraction of them claimed the status of *kshatrya* while others tried to reform their diet, becoming vegetarians. Unlike the Gond chiefs, who married into a Rajput family and were recognized as Nagbansi *kshatrya*, the Santal claims, expressed merely by manipulating Hindu symbols like the sacred thread, were not acknowledged. This reformist movement somehow discouraged sanskritization in Santal society. First, because the Santal insurrection had left a bad memory and a resentful image of the Hindu as an exploiter; second, because Christian education seemed to provide a broader possibility of social ascension.

Impure agents of sanskritization

For these various reasons, the Santal understood quickly that a difference existed between a subjective status claimed by someone and a status recognized by the dominant caste. Moreover, in the regions peopled by the Santal, the agents of sanskritization were not Brahmans with whom they did not have direct contacts, but Hindu *ojhas* or gurus who sporadically taught some fragments of local Hinduism²² to the Santal witch-finders (also named *ojha*). These witch-finders were not a dominant caste; rather they approached the ideal of renunciation. The Santal *ojha* reinterpreted some knowledge of the Hindu pantheon into their own view of sacrifice where exorcism was prevalent. According to Santal texts written at the beginning of the century²³ it was necessary to know Hindu gods — portrayed on the model of the human exploiters — in order to drive them

²² Local Hinduism here refers to popular tradition and alludes to the regional model which prevails in a particular area. Local Hinduism is opposed to all India Hinduism more characterised by sanskritic references.

²³ I have been working on a large collection of Santal manuscripts written at the beginning of the century by Santal informants under the encouragement of P.O. Bodding. I have submitted a large number of these texts to the interpretation of my Santal informants.

away through exorcism. Hindu gods, like Hindu men, were insidiously trying to infiltrate the tribal community and it became necessary to protect oneself against them. For these reasons, the Hindu *ojha*,²⁴ who did not emphasize purity as a religious value, but was making symbolic use of impurity in ritual, may rather exemplify Hinduization, as they were embedded in local, sometimes tantric,²⁵ Hinduism.

Moreover, it seems to me that Hinduization occurs without sanskritization in the Santal society, for a number of reasons:

- first, the Santals are still resentful since the Santal rebellion has led to a rejection of Hindu high caste values;
- second, the economic transformations and agrarian movements have created contacts with low castes, with whom they had recently developed political solidarity. This has provoked a spread of local Hinduism, rather than a locus for the imitation of the behavior of a dominant, higher caste;
- third, due to missionary education, strongly opposed to the values of Hindu society, the Santal elite has developed an egalitarian ethos better fit for the traditional tribal structure where the power of different headmen or territorial chiefs was more important than ritual status.

In Santal society, except for sporadic movements like the Saph Hor, ritual prestige is not expressed in terms of ritual purity. The village priest has ritual power since he shares some symbolical affinity with the cult of the *buru bonga* "mountain deities". Unlike the Bhumij, who possessed land and could have their status claims recognized to a certain extent, the Santal have tried to reassert their tribal identity by developing symbolic responses to acculturation. These symbolic responses are expressed at different levels of belief: the borrowed items might be semantic micro-units which are incorporated in the tribal core of beliefs. For example, in many Santal villages, the village priest pours water or rice-beer over a rock (or on the top of a hill) whenever he utters a prayer to get rain for the whole community. In that case, prayers are addressed to a mountain deity *buru bonga*. In some other villages, one can find a Hindu version of the same ritual where a libation of milk stands for the former libation while a Hinduized mantra may be addressed to a Hinduized deity named *Otere*

²⁴ The only acceptable path to hinduization was the Hindu *ojha* who did not emphasize purity.

²⁵ This trend is particularly present in Bengal.

*bonga*²⁶ “ground deity”. In the second version of this ritual, the link with the ancestor mountain can no longer be traced. According to my informants, the success of the ritual, which is silent, rests on the purity of the *naeke*, “village priest”. This does not mean that he consciously imitates the Brahman; even if the function is similar and some *naeke* wear a sacred thread when they live in multi-ethnic villages. Moreover, my informants do not consider that the second version of the ritual is superior to the first one, but consider that both rituals can help to get rain.

Before comparing this structural level of Hinduization — which operates at a semi-conscious level — to other agents of Hinduization, I would like to present briefly an example of the Santal way of reinterpreting Hindu values.

How to divide communities?

The following story, called *hatin jati reak' katha*, “the division into communities”,²⁷ was written down by the Santal themselves at the beginning of the century, but is still known in fragments in the different regions inhabited by the Santal. In this long story, the emergence of the twelve Santal clans is followed by the destruction of tribal humanity by the Hindu god Thakur. Thakur acted in such a way in order to punish the ancestors, who committed incest under the encouragement of the tribal god Maran Buru, who taught them how to make rice-beer. On several points, the story opposes the tribal permissive society, ruled by the consensus of a small group of ancestors, to the coercitive law, *bicar*, that the Hindus are trying to impose on Santal society. Finally, in order to establish further distinctions between groups, the Hindu god Thakur introduces hierarchy into the tribal world. He called the tribal god and urged him to organize a big feast. They decided to classify the undivided humanity according to dietary rules. Therefore, they offered many kinds of food, non-vegetarian and vegetarian, in leaf cups. They called the human beings, and organized a race. They told them that the winners could take the first share of the food.

The Santal, running very fast, came first, and took cow meat which was their favorite dish, while the late-comers took other kinds of meat, and

²⁶ The name of this Hinduized goddess is santalized, which indicates that the borrowing concerns here only scattered element of the ritual (libations of milk), leaving its original structure unaltered.

²⁷ The term *jati* simply refers here to a group or category rather than to the more specialized meaning of castes.

became low castes. Finally, some groups came late, being too lazy to run fast, and they took the food that was left, the sugary dishes. "They form today the Brahman caste and they have a fat body not fit for hard physical labour."

Of course, this "mythical" story tries to justify the preference of the Santal for cow-meat and rejects their own values. But it also applies to the Brahman. They become the losers in some kind of satirical hierarchy because they ate what was left (not the impure, but the weak food).

Our story does not end here, but provides us with an important point regarding Hinduization. Later on Santal clans and Hindus fought against each other and gradually the ancestors were obliged to follow on some occasions an odd custom called "purification" or "sprinkling of purified water". This happened — according to our text — because some Santal betrayed the Santal society and followed a Hindu chief, Mandho Singh, born from a Santal woman who had taken service in some Hindu house. These Santals became traitors and accepted the purification ceremony (sprinkling of sacred water on the new-born baby before he can receive a name and be placed under the protection of his clan deity). This custom is interpreted through different symbolical devices — according to the prophecy of a midwife who admonishes the Santal ancestors, telling them that it is important to protect new-born babies by a purification ritual. The ancestors try to deny the importance of this alien ritual, and decide to consult the omens and thus legitimate a borrowed Hindu item. Moreover, they always preserve some kind of tribal symbolism in the celebration of the ritual itself. For example, they say that the birth purification ritual should take place under the shadow of a tree *sarjom* (*shorea robusta*), where the ancestors of the tribe stopped during their migrations. Though the purification ceremony does not always takes place under such a tree, it shows us how Santal symbolic thought resists mere Hinduization. First, the only purification which seems essential to them is not a relational purification connected with status concerns, but a purification/protection legitimised by consulting omens before acceptation. Second, the story itself, which elaborates a set of whole constructions (that I cannot present here) regarding pure and impure things testifies that the adoption of a Hindu custom embedded in its set of values does not immediately induce a mere imitative model, but on the contrary appears questionable to the tribal mind. *Does this juxtaposition of heterogenous elements, tribal and Hindu, form a syncretism?*

The Sanskritization or Hinduization model implies a religious change which is based on the idea that the dominated groups (low castes or tribes) have a tendency to mould their behavior according to the standards of

values of the dominant group. This dominance is economic and ideological; for example, in Orissa, the Kurmi is a dominant agricultural caste from the point of view of economy, but they are sanskritized and do not try to express their claims in terms of purity and even share cooked food with the Santal. I have deliberately preferred the term of Hinduization rather than sanskritization, because the internalisation of Hindu values does not necessarily imply the choice of adapting behavior to these values. In the previous examples, Hinduization accompanies reassertion of Santal values.

This process, which I have stressed at the representational level, also works at the sociological level. It explains why, at different periods of time or in different regions, various sub-groups of a tribal culture react differently towards Hindu tradition. As these reactions do not form a harmonious syncretism, but rather express "contradictions", I would like to ask: are these contradictions inherent to any dominated group (or society)? Do they represent ways in which the "savage" mind deals with the change,²⁸ or are they context dependent, and produced by particular socio-economic conditions which variously generate harmonious or disharmonious agents of sanskritization? To try to answer these questions, I have to compare briefly the Santal of different states. At this level, we may postulate that if the savage mind is one,²⁹ it selects its objects according to local configurations. This is, of course, partly determined by the power relationship at work in a particular situation: the degree of participation of tribal people in the global economy, the urbanization of tribal people, the impact of Christianity, the particularities of local castes, and the possible emergency of a dominant caste. Furthermore, it is determined by the presence, more or less active, of a tribal party, and of religious tribal revivalist movements or, on the other hand, of Hindu oriented sanskritization movements. To these factors, which are not explanations in themselves, but determine the sociological situation, we can add other phenomena of group solidarity such as inter-tribal or caste/tribe solidarity, which will have an effect on the previous factors I have mentioned.

Parameters of hinduization are various in tribal society, but often they have been evaluated only as imperfect steps towards the Great Tradition

²⁸ For example, S. Sinha (1965:154) recognizes that the borrowed items are understood differently, but he does not go deeply into analyzing Bhumij symbolism: "Some Hindu deities have been accepted in the Bhumij pantheon, but to the average Bhumij, they conform to their original idea about deities as merely powerful non-moral beings."

²⁹ The concept of "savage mind" refers, of course, to C. Lévi-Strauss (1962), who has demonstrated the ability of primitive thought to adopt change without altering its original structure.

and deprived of any intrinsic logic. They produce metaphorical answers — a kind of symbolic survival of the tribe visualized as an entity — rather than imitating the values of dominant society. Let us now study the regional differences.

The Santal of Bihar

In Bihar, where Christianization took place long ago, a schism has been created between Christians who marry each other, and other tribals. To be Christian in the Santal *Parganas* means a complete separation from tribal religion and activities since Christians are forbidden to drink the Santal rice-beer which is so essential to the celebration of rituals. Unlike the Christians, who have accepted the diet and the sexual code imposed by missionaries, the non-Christians still refuse to change their traditional dietary habits and matrimonial customs such as marriage by elopement and pre-marital sexual permissiveness. The formation of an elite among the Santal first took place in Bihar, where the elite is Christian, Westernized and professionally more competent. More recently, economic problems such as the unemployment of individual young graduates belonging to the elite group have had an impact on politics. This elite has been providing political leadership to other tribes of Bihar (Ho, Munda, Oraon). Inter-tribal solidarity is achieved through an educated group and this accentuates the discrepancies between elite and commoners inside the tribe. Even among the still traditional Santal, the elite working in industrial towns is more prosperous than the village people. Buying lands in the rural areas, they activate conflicts with commoners. In the same vein, ritual participation between members of the elite and commoners is not regular, since the disparity of wealth may provoke resentful feelings from the peasant kin who do not go to work in town. In Bihar, where the elite is involved in inter-tribal movements, the commoners seek solidarity with the low castes with whom they sometimes work side by side.

The Santal of Orissa

The Santal of Keonjhar and Mayurbhanj in Orissa have remained almost untouched by Christian influence. They sometimes live in multi-ethnic villages where they are in contact with Hindu castes such as Kurmi, Dom, Muci, Boistom (Vaishnavite), Hari and some related tribes like Munda, Ho and Oraon. They have practically no contact with Brahmans who are very conservative and avoid them.

In contrast to the Bihar situation, there are no substantial landowners among the Santal of Orissa. In remote areas, Santal have contact with Hindu castes through market transactions, since Santal women come to sell vegetables, wood for fuel consumption, fish and rice-beer in exchange of kerosene, and ready-made clothes. In multi-ethnic villages, the Santal generally live in separate hamlets and have their own traditional headman and village-priest, while a member of the dominant agricultural caste — such as Gopal or Kurmi — may be the *podhan* (“headman”). He is responsible for everybody in the affairs of the whole village regardless of ethnic or caste consideration. If the Santal community is locally dominant in terms of population, he might be a Santal. The Santal participate in a certain amount of village economic exchanges: they buy clothes from the Tanti, copper utensils from the Lohar, earthen pots from the Kumhar, baskets from the Dom, fishing implements from the Munda, ropes made of bark from the Birhor, leather goods from the Bhuiya, groceries from the Muslims, tobacco from the Paddors, while they sometimes work in Ho fields. In some other villages, where the Ho have no lands, they come to work in Santal fields. This enumeration confirms that the Santal exchange goods and labour mostly with low castes. They have very few contacts with the local dominant castes of Gopal or Mandal. Each community celebrates its religious festivals separately: in case of common worship of a territorial goddess like Mangla Devi or Thakurani³⁰ who ensures fecundity in women, the Santal women may join the procession of the goddess, but they do not take *prasad* (sweets “offerings”) from Hindu women.

The criteria of caste attributes based on the purity of occupation, diet and marriage, do not appeal to the Santal. This is the case in all the different states. The Santal seem to ignore the ritual implication of taking food from the hands of Hindu castes. Thus, some Santal men accept cooked food from Brahmans and Kshatryas when they work as carpenters or gardeners in high caste houses. Santal women do not accept food from any Hindu caste except when they are working in mines or factories. The Santal women, at least, consider that they should avoid getting polluted (*jutid*) by sharing food with non-Santals. Thus, their ritual purity enables them to make offerings to the ancestors of their husbands. In Mayurbhanj, Santal women are prevented from coming too close to Hindu women during some festival observances, such as the night of Shiv *ratri* when Hindu women fast. On the other hand, there are some unions between Santal women and Kurmi men and these marriages are accepted, from the Santal point of view, since

³⁰ On the evidence of an ancient royal model connected with a Hindu territorial goddess, cf. M. Carrin-Bouez (1978).

the Kurmi are considered wealthy landowners compared to themselves. They justify these unions by the story that a Santal chief escaping from Muslim soldiers was given shelter in a Kurmi house. Since the Kurmi sometimes claim the status of *ksatriya*, they consider this marriage a step towards sanskritization in refusing to give women in return to Santal. Still, the two groups exchange cooked food in daily life.

Tensions occur between Santal and Hindu castes particularly in conflicts between employer and employee, opposing Santal to outsiders such as the Rajasthanis. In their employ, Santals are generally exploited. Traditionally, the Santal have no part in the caste division of labour, though they do casual work in the field of Hindu landowners. Santal women are sometimes employed husking and storing paddy in Hindu houses. The comparatively well-to-do families who have a small farm or are employed in a government job do not mix at all with the Hindu and try to get their children educated in missionary schools in Bihar. In Orissa, however, the tribal elite, more concerned with the community than with private interests, organize the teaching of Santali in government schools. They have, since 1980, taken part in the politics of the wider society, as an effective means of attaining tribal solidarity. This tendency was accentuated by the movement of Sonaram Soren who in 1949 wanted to separate Mayurbhanj from Orissa and merge it with Bihar. In Orissa, the authorities ordered firing on the Santal crowd, and at Gunduria thousands of demonstrators were shot dead. In Mayurbhanj the Santal annually celebrate this martyrdom which they call *said bonga*, "sacrifice for martyrdom". This kind of celebration, expresses the search for identity which has led to the development of a sub-national movement which tries to establish inter-tribal solidarity and to promote tribal economic interests. The Santal engaged in this movement are generally members of the Jharkhand party.³¹ This movement can be considered as a symbolic answer to acculturation since it tries to produce a cultural reassertion of tribal values. In Mayurbhanj, we find a cultural association and a different religious movement, the *sarna dhorom*, which cooperate on certain occasions. The association is called Adibasi Socio Cultural Association. Its explicit objectives are mostly cultural: promotion of tribal literature in Santal and other Mundari languages in the medium of *ol* script, invented by R. Murmu, a Santal school-teacher, combining some ideograms with indo-aryan alphabets.³²

³¹ The religious movement itself was founded in 1970 by Guru Besnao, a traditional villager living near Rairangpur (Mayurbhanj). At the beginning, the movement had only a religious expression. Later, it developed links with the Jharkhand party.

³² See M. Carrin-Bouez, 1986.

Murmu's disciples have trained local teachers to collect and distribute oral literature; they also publish school books to introduce elements of Santal tradition as well as basic scientific knowledge to the younger generation.

The religious side of the movement is expressed through the cult of the Sarna Dhorom (*sarna* means "grove" and *dhorom* means "sacred"). This revitalization movement tries to promote the cult of pan-mundari village deities worshipped during special sessions by neighbouring tribes like the Munda and the Ho. Side by side with this celebration they organize inter-tribal hunting, or an educational meeting where the *gurus* of the Sarna Dhorom explain the aim of their government. The religious overtone of the movement is quite clear: A Santal villager had the revelation that the sacred grove deities needed a revitalization of the tribal cult. Several times the deities reappeared and prevented the villagers from adopting Hindu gods or mixing with Hindu castes. Consequently, they decided to eliminate Hindu customs, and even, in certain villages, to renew past Santal traditions, such as the cow sacrifice (*salei bongga*) in the last part of funerals.³³ The Santal *gurus* have tried to remodel the tribal religion of the Santal. They do not call the hinduized *ojha* (witch doctors) in case of disease. Instead, they stress the *guru* figure, implying the use of Hindu ideas. In the case of sickness and individual crisis, the *gurus* of this movement perform rituals for the protection of children, and sacrifice a chicken on such occasions. The fact that they sacrifice animals for the benefit of those who attend their sessions shows that the title of *guru* grants them a ritual status. This is recognized by those of the neighboring tribes and low castes who agree with the aim of the movement. The message of the *gurus* is also expressed in religious songs and in plays staged in many tribal villages.

Despite initial success, the Association (and the Sarna Dhorom Movement run by the same group of Santal) are now facing difficulties in propagating *ol* script, in recruiting other tribal members and in avoiding internal conflicts.

First, the poorer class of Santal villagers do not understand the aims of the Association very well, and are not ready to allow a ritual status to the *gurus*; they prefer to go to traditional village priests (*naeke*) or witch-finders (*ojha*). Second, other tribes like the Munda and the Ho in this area do not want to adopt *ol* script which was invented by a Santal. Besides this, a Ho from Chaibasa (Bihar) has also invented a script for the Ho language and has found his own followers mostly among the well-to-do Ho families. Like the *gurus* of the Sarna Dhorom Movement, some Ho "pandits" have

³³ Of course, the rumor of secret cow-sacrifice has provoked a strong opposition from the Hindu population.

decided to link the use and propagation of the new Ho script with a reformist religious movement. Unlike the Santal, who are trying to promote tribal cult and reassert pantribal identity, the Ho pandits are trying to elaborate a religious code of behavior which could facilitate the integration of the Ho. Nevertheless, the Ho pandits of the Adi Samaj Mahasabha reject caste discriminations based on purity and refer to Vedic India as a "pure forgotten religion", the ideal of which could inspire a new Hindu way of life purified of caste prejudices. The latter movement does not emphasize the *guru* figure but affirms an "inclination towards asceticism" and implicitly recruits its own members like a sect. The non-participation of the Ho in the Santal movement can also be explained by the fact that the former has a smaller elite and is as yet more involved in their traditional economy. This is characterized by important exchanges of goods between kin groups in marriages and funerals. The failure of inter-tribal solidarity in Northern Orissa has also been reinforced by the conflicts in the Jharkhand Party which split in two factions.³⁴

Thus, all these factors have prevented the Santal revitalization movement from having an effective ideological influence on the Santal masses of Bihar, Orissa and West Bengal. The Movement has organized Conferences in different States, trying to strengthen Santal solidarity, but has faced problems since local elites have different interests.

Without going into detail, we can assume that the symbolic responses are stronger in Orissa for several reasons: first, the protagonists of the Santal Association are a young but poorly educated elite who are not fully recognized either by the Santal well-to-do families or by the traditional leadership (village headmen and territorial chiefs) who still command respect and authority in Orissa. Besides, the modern political elite (M.L.A.) does not give its full support to the Santal Association for a number of reasons. There are divergencies between the Adivasi Association and both the traditional and modern leaders, since the Association wants to interfere in law-suits concerning land conflicts between Santal and non-Santal. They want to include the Santal traditional laws in the penal code, a demand which is rejected by most of the Santal leaders as unrealistic.

If the Santal Association has not succeeded in fighting economic exploitation of the Santal in different local situations, it has created cultural links between Santal of different regions and probably has accelerated the

³⁴ To-day the Jharkhand party has split in two factions: the Jharkhand and the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha which was founded in 1972, and which is independent from any Congress affiliation. The second one represents the separatist aspirations of the tribals.

rise of political consciousness — oriented towards tribalism — which has been perceived by the authorities as a threat to national integration.

From the religious point of view, the Sarna Dhorom ritual — which is certainly not a syncretism — has attracted a certain number of Hindu castes like the Mahto, Kurmi, Tanti. These come to attend the “Adivasi Sarna puja” which is addressed to tribal deities, but which has a recognized effectiveness against sickness. In this respect, the Santal Association has found some common language with the agricultural and low castes, achieved mostly through the mediation of women.

Finally, we come to the contradiction that while the Kurmi and Mahto participate (on an individual basis) in the cult of the Sarna Dhorom, the Ho and the poorer Santal reject the revivalistic ethos. In some way, the cleavage between elite and commoners prevents a strong development of intra-ethnic solidarity. The poorer class of Santal and Ho follow the traditional tribal religion, while the Ho elite engaged itself in the reformist movement of the Adi Samaj who wants to purify Hinduism of its “evil” social prejudices.

Moreover, the other tribal groups, Ho, Munda, Oraon and Bhumij do not support the Santal leaders, because they consider that the Santal are trying to impose on them a dominating attitude and they consequently accuse the Santal leaders of political opportunism.

The other tribes in Orissa, the Kond, Bhuiya and Juang, have political leaders too,³⁵ but they have not been engaged in promoting a new identity or in providing real intra-ethnic solidarity.

On the other hand, the Santal local political dominance is not expressed through the idiom of dominant caste.³⁶

³⁵ The tribal political leaders have been former students of Christian schools and are quite familiar with Western egalitarian values of society. They consequently react against “casteism” and complain against the Hindu-oriented attitude of some other Indian officials.

³⁶ A dominant caste might play, as S.N. Srinivas (1959) has demonstrated, a decisive role in society if its position is not too low in the caste hierarchy. It should have local numerical preponderance, land, access to modern education and control of political power. If the Santal are numerically dominant in some regions (Mayurbhanj) they do not possess enough land to act as a dominant group. Nevertheless, they have an educated elite.

The Santal of Bengal

Unlike the Santal of Orissa, the Santal of Bengal do not develop an ethnic and cultural particularism. The Santal situation is quite different in Bengal. First, we have to consider that Bengal is more industrialized and historically has developed its own features: a weaker caste system, active participation in the movement for Independence, and a broader and earlier tradition of Western education. In Bengal, the Santal are often agricultural labourers or small farmers. They are also employed in Government and private factories and in small rural industries. Historically, the Santal of Bengal have often taken an active part (together with the low-caste people) in conflicts against landlords. Traditional Bengali high caste people — who live in multi-ethnic villages — consider that they have three kinds of enemies: Muslims, Adibasi and Harijans. These three groups have received lands from government, provoking jealousy. Moreover, the situation is tense whenever Santals do casual labour in high-caste people's fields, for these oppositions implicitly refer to political opposition between C.P.M. and the Congress. High castes complain about the politicisation of the tribals.

In Bengal, where the Jharkhand movement is weaker because it competes with the communist party in recruiting tribal followers, political claims are not linked with religious movements. This does not imply that the Santal of Bengal do not produce any symbolic response to the dominant Hindu society. But these symbolic answers seem to take more individualistic forms than in Orissa. Two categories of Santal individuals seem clearly more hinduized: the *ojha*, who in Bengal become devotees of such Hindu goddesses as Manasa and Kali, considered to be their tutelary deities. These *ojha* attract devotees from other castes who consult them in case of sickness. This process affects Santal women, too, who sometimes try to establish themselves as female *ojha*. Transgressing the taboo which prevents them from becoming priestesses in traditional Santal society, they establish cults of Hindu goddesses. Some of them develop a tantric touch and worship the dark Kali of the cremation ground by night. These priestesses are feared, but they provide a symbolic and social link between Hindu castes and Santal, since women belonging to any caste or tribe consult them in case of evil or sickness.

Besides this encompassing role of Santal female *ojha*, we find some hints of Hinduization in women who have left their traditional society to take a Hindu husband. Sometimes he is a degraded Brahman or a *kayastha*; more often a member of a low caste. The individuals engaged in such unions feel subjectively excluded from their community. They also feel upset by the deities of both the tribal and Hindu pantheon who torment them. This type of marginal situation provokes an individual crisis that the individuals try

to resolve by establishing Hindu cults of their own and by recruiting their own disciples. These cults can also be addressed to some local Bengali gods such as Dharmo Thakur and include some tribal elements — like uttering mantras in Santali — or using Santal techniques of exorcizing malevolent deities while performing Hindu *puja* to Manasa or Kali. These cults attract devotees from different castes; mostly women. Where the *guru* (whether male or female) is not an *ojha*, he declares that he is inspired by the goddess Kali herself and makes prophecies or uses divinatory devices of various kinds to foretell the future condition of the consultant, generally a sick person.

This Hinduization process, while concerning mainly the individual, pervades Santal Society with elements of the Great Tradition. In the Birbhum district, where I have studied these cults, Santals were including some Hindu devotional practices in their daily life, the worship of the tulasi tree, for example. They also seemed more conscious about purification rituals in life-crises and did not seem to reject Hindu values systematically (except the Karma theory of retribution of acts and reincarnation) as do the Santal of Bihar and Orissa.

These categories of individuals represent agents of Hinduization, but do not thereby achieve higher status. Rather, they are rejected by both communities.

The Hinduization process plays a role on the individual level, but does not affect participation in the tribal cult groups. Nevertheless, it helps the diffusion of local tantric Hinduism.

Since the Santal are nowhere dominant in Bengal, they are not able to have any influence on village politics. But they are important in the sphere of individual crisis and illness, which transcends cultural differences. In this respect, the new Santal cults I have mentioned share some features with low-caste cults, since the rites of both are attended by the same participants.

The Santal *gurus* of these cults are agents rather of Hinduization than Sanskritization, as they are not in such a position to claim any higher status in the hierarchy. They have generally lost their status in tribal society. This is especially the case with women who live with Hindu men, since their relationship is not recognized as a marriage. No wonder the *gurus* try to consider themselves as “children of the goddess”, or try to identify themselves with the renouncers of Hindu society. Nevertheless, such Santal *gurus* seek recognition in tribal society to oppose the *ojha* whom they consider as *pap ren ko*, “evil doers”, because the latter are professional medicine-men and witch-finders, who practice exorcism only to drive away malevolent deities.

Conclusion

I have been trying to show the existence of different levels of Hinduization in Santal society, taking into consideration diachrony and local regional variations. Historically, the antagonism between Santal society and caste society has been accentuated by colonial rule which increased the economic differences between Hindus and non-Hindus. Nevertheless, the local action of missionaries has contributed to the formation of a Westernized Santal elite able to resist political dominance from aliens; for example, in Bihar, the Santal elite is dominant economically and has not achieved an homogeneous political unity. Thus, we can assume that the two kinds of dominance (economical and political) are not automatically linked.

In the same way, in Bengal the Santal are economically and politically dominated, while in Orissa they are economically dominated, but represent a political minority unit due to their number and cohesion.

When the Santal are both economically and politically dominated, the ethnic overtone is not emphasized: Hinduism is more or less accepted as a language. Nevertheless, the type of Hinduization which prevails in Bengal shows an inclination towards asceticism or new cults, a situation which does not imply the strict adherence to pure and impure values. When Santal are trying to reassert their identity as they do in Orissa, Hinduism is denied such as in the Sarna Dhorom movement. More generally, Hinduization can be considered as a symbolic answer to dominance whenever rejection of Hindu values is not possible. Historically, this situation means that in Santal society, this process has been mediated by the colonial situation and not by a traditional division of labour like the *jajmani* system. The Santal have been economically dominated through the colonial market situation. Meanwhile, their demographic importance in industrialized regions has placed them in the new world of labour. The Santal were able to generate a symbolic response because they had a tradition of leadership prepared to reassert identity. The Ho, on the other hand, were unable to react similarly due to their division into two economic classes: landowners and commoners.

I have suggested that Hinduization takes place in the symbolism of birth ritual and in rain-making ceremony. The borrowed Hindu items form a semi-conscious level of Hinduization, embedded in ritual micro-units, which is found in Santal cults of any of the three regions inhabited by the Santal. The second borrowed item is represented by the *guru* figure with its inclination towards asceticism, producing contradictions in traditional Santal society, especially in the case of female priestesses. This represents the tantric devotional trend.

Such borrowed Hindu items represent a tacit acceptance of a minimal set of purity values which, in the case of the Santal, are not linked with any claim to rank. The last level is more ideological and concerns the Gandhian ideal of purity and asceticism which has pervaded some tribal movements like the Ho *samaj* who tries to promote "a purified *adi sanskriti*" Hinduism which represents, according to the view of Ho pandits, an *adi sanskriti* metaphor of national integration. This metaphor is not shared by the Santal, who are still dreaming of pan-tribal religious and political unity.

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The foreigner as incestuous kin, a dialectic of closeness and remoteness among the Santals

Social space: degrees of closeness and remoteness

In a Santal village the spatial symbolism expresses in its own way the dialectic of remoteness and closeness. Moreover, the deities themselves are supposed to live in different places, thus allowing men to identify them. The spatial opposition of forest and village is dominant: the forest is the abode of dangerous deities and one should not go alone in the forest in order to avoid being attacked by a malevolent deity. Next to the forest are the *dendro sima*, the burnt boundaries which correspond to the old slash and burn space cleared out by the ancestors and the *barge sima*, the boundaries which delimitate the cultivated area. *Sima* is simply the last cross-road which ends the village street. A differentiated knowledge of boundaries is displayed at rituals. Some clan (local descent groups) rituals show the necessity to bury the leftover of the sacrificial food. Here the distinction between what is outside *bahar* and what is inside *bhitri* is very significant and will apply to social categories.

Inside the village itself, the sacred grove reproduces the forest in the village and shelters the village deities, even if the same deities are found in every sacred grove of every village. Santals only worship these deities in their own villages — for married women, in their husbands' village. The dichotomy between *bhitri* "inside" and *bahar* "outside" is conceived in terms of ritual space. The innermost space of the house is the *bhitar*, the altar for the ancestors. After her marriage, a married daughter who belongs to her husband's lineage will not be allowed to pay homage to her father's ancestral deities — she keeps her clan name but this name remains inactivated. To the same extent, a group of agnatic kin belonging to the same sub-clan will be allowed to show the sacrificial food. The term *kond* refers to a ritual and commensal unit which is somewhat wider than the little group of brothers who can share the same ancestral altar. If closeness is defined by agnatic ties, remoteness (*sangar*) alludes first to people who belong to other clans. The Santal are divided into twelve exogamous clans

which have been subdivided into more than one hundred and sixty clans.³⁷ Nevertheless, the same sub-clan names are found inside the twelve clans. The most redundant sub-clan names are related to a particular mode of worship that each of these groups is supposed to have adopted.³⁸

People who belong to the same sub-clans share a similar myth of origin and a certain degree of closeness. Strictly speaking, only the clans are exogamous but it can happen that the villagers avoid marrying into the same sub-clan. Some of these sub-clans trace their origin through kin who for some reason committed some kind of mistake, violence or impurity. The descendants of these people are slightly looked down upon: one can joke about them, but this does not really imply a hierarchy. Nevertheless, some of sub-clans which were the least prestigious in the past are perceived today as very remote.³⁹ In the same way, the descendants of two antagonist major clans the Kisku who were kings and the Marndi who were landlords avoid inter-marrying. Here, the feeling of a past strong identity creates a kind of remoteness.

The term *diku* "foreigner" is also found among the Munda speaking tribes. The expression *diku-n* means "to settle on somebody's land by force" and alludes to the Hindus who robbed the Santals of their lands during the British times. V. Hoffman (1950) gives the following meaning of the term *diku* "Hindu", a Hindu landlord. P.O. Bodding (1934) translates *diku* as "a Hindu or Bengali of the better clan, not a low-caste Hindu": "Dom, Bauri, Hadi, Muslim are not called *diku*".

A *diku* is therefore one who does not belong to the group. The term refers to an outsider but it has a welter of associations. The term was used widely during the Santal revolt of 1917 in Mayurbhanj and earlier during the Santal rebellion of 1855. Sinha, Sen and Panchbhai (1969) came to the conclusion that the term was used to refer to the non-tribal in general. Moreover, the low-caste Hindu like the Chamar (leather-workers), the Teli (dealers in oil), Tanti (weavers), Kumhar (potters), are generally not looked upon as *diku* by the uneducated Santals with pejorative connotation: for

³⁷ The segmentation of the twelve origin clans into a great number of sub-clans corresponds to tribal migrations. The Santals are found in Bihar, Bengal, Orissa and Assam.

³⁸ Each sub-clan has its own deity *abge bongga*, the deity of the place of origin who often stopped a group of ancestors. The name of the sub-clan often describes a way to worship the clanic deity: for example, the villages who belong to the sub-clan *jabe* "litt. throat in pieces" make an incision in the throat of their sacrificial victims.

³⁹ For example, the people who belong to the sub-clan *baske* are often considered as a low-status group. Their ancestors have eaten left-over food.

example, it is generally thought that *diku* are looters, and trouble-makers (*sigid ko menakoa*). The *diku* is thus the indifferent or hostile outsider who is to be driven away. The feeling of solidarity of the group has been reinforced by the *diku* concept, but this does not mean that the *diku* concept coincides with the notion of remoteness. The *diku* concept has particularly been used on occasions where the group has been threatened. The pejorative stereotype of *diku* has been emphasized at such times but the stereotype is always reinterpreted. For example, when more recently in the 1970 the Santals were engaged in forcible harvesting with their low-caste neighbours, they elaborated another dichotomy: the *maran diku*, "hostile, high-status foreigner", and the *hurin diku*, "small law-status foreigner", people sharing the same economic level of life.

The capture and sacrifice of a foreigner

Previously, the Santal used to sacrifice a man belonging to a neighbouring tribe to their deities *buru* during the annual rainmaking sacrifice. The *buru* are connected with the stories of the clans and the expression *Maran Buru* "high mountain" refers to the creation god. Metaphorically, the same expression alludes to the eldest son for a patrilineal family. In exchange for a victim beheaded on the top of a hill, the *buru bonga* could grant rain to the Santals. Without describing the whole ritual here, let us stress that it was necessary to capture a victim among the foreign tribes. It seems that a hierarchy of power may have existed between the Chotanagpur tribes, since the human sacrifice seems to have implied an asymmetrical relationship between the Santals and the other Munda tribes: apparently the Santals could sacrifice a Kharia but the Kharia would not have dared to capture a Santal as a human victim.

In 1978, I attended such a ritual and it was difficult for me to watch the scene where the hunting priest was raising an axe above a kharia man, a *diku* a "foreigner" who was tied up. A great silence punctuated this ritual and I stood at a distance as my presence as a woman and as a foreigner could have spoiled the ritual. On my way to the ritual, the Santals tried to stop me at first. The human victim pretending to be killed had to lie down quite a while, he was then helped to get up and was finally released. He disappeared in the forest and the rain started to fall. When he ran in direction of the forest he was still clad in *sarjom*⁴⁰ leaves which

⁴⁰ (*Shorea robusta*, gartn.)

represented the ancestors of the Santals (here, certainly the symbolism of *sarjom* leaves represent a way to Santalize the foreigner).

He was released but not saved as it was certain he would die. The deities, I was ensured, will themselves complete the sacrifice. Later on, I was told that he died “mysteriously” after having drunken rice-beer.

J. Hoffman (1950) in his *Encyclopachia Mundarica*, mentions that among the Munda a similar custom prevailed: some professional sacrificers, the *ondoka*, “the cutters of the little finger” used to capture foreigners in the jungle and to cut or simply injure their little finger in order to collect their blood in a little iron tube called *sinji*. Later on, they used to bury that blood in worshipping their *buru*, hill deities.

The rain-making sacrifice stresses clearly the importance of ritualization of the ethnic differences among societies who seem to have lived in a relative peace. All these Munda tribes seem to have practised more or less similar forms of sacrifice or mutilation of a foreigner. The concept of *diku* “foreigner” seems to have been elaborated *a posteriori* in the pre-British times when non-Munda people came to settle in the tribal areas.

If the neighbouring tribes seem to have accomplished the same sacrifice, it is also true that they share the same pantheon of deities, *bonga* who reside in roads and trees. In the ritual I witnessed, the *bonga* were supposed to be satisfied to get the mock sacrifice of a human victim and they were actually supposed to achieve the sacrifice in the other world. This kind of ritual is alluded in Santal by the term *dopo*, a reciprocal expression of the term *der* “copulate” which usually evokes incest.

Apparently, the sacrifice of a foreign victim is not incest, so I first wondered why it was called *dopo*. Later I discovered that the expression *dopo* was used in different contexts connected with human sacrifice and incest, contexts which could also express a dialectic of remoteness and closeness. For example, the term *dopo* alludes to incestuous relationships which are thought of in terms of extreme closeness: thus, to refer to incest with the mother, one says in Santal that “father and son are using the same mortar”. It is also *dopo* to sacrifice a human victim but it seems less *dopo* to sacrifice a foreigner, since it is implied that the sacrifice of a Santal would result in madness.

The dialectic of remoteness and closeness appears clearly at two levels:

- definition of incest
- the definition of *bonga* deities as incestuous kin.

The notion of incest

The Santals allude to the notion of incest by the reciprocal form of *deper* "copulate" which is also used to qualify a situation of sexual transgression.

Incest is perceived symbolically as a world of closeness, almost a solipsism. The brother/sister incest, recalling the original Santal couple, evokes a certain nostalgia. In the folk-tales, a brother and a sister sometimes kill each other to avoid incest. In these stories, the village people try to marry them posthumously and burn them on the same funeral pyre. Nevertheless, two separate columns of smokes raise towards the sky. Thus, incest should not even be represented symbolically. Less abstractly brother/sister incest may be associated with the brother consuming his sister in a phantasm of cannibalism. In one such myth, four brothers want their sister: as a substitute they kill her and eat her flesh; for some reason, the younger brother refuses to eat his share and buries it: after a while, from the buried flesh, sprouts a tobacco plant. A similar cannibalistic motive is present in another tale: the daughter takes the shape of a leopard and tries to attack her father whom she loves secretly.

In several stories of witchcraft, the mother-in-law, with the help of her daughter-in-law, divorces her son magically. Thus the two women, ideally coming from the same clan, represent the danger of the alliance.

In all these examples, incest is desired as a kind of mirror image of the self: the sister hurts her finger and by chance the brothers taste her blood—their blood—and find the taste too good.

The symbolical sacrifice of a man belonging to a "foreign" tribe and the incest with kin are identified.

The mirror of the self: The deities as "hidden relatives"

The deities of the Santal, the *bonga*, are seen by them as a prolongation of their own existence. The deceased as ancestor carries the lineage name for three generations, thereafter they are unnamed and finally they become *bonga*.

Santal deities offer a paradox of closeness and remoteness. Women are supposed to be closer to the *bonga* world than the men. This is expressed at different levels: first, during the marriage-ceremony, the bride is brought in a huge basket and this is called *dauran bongga*, "to bring the *bonga*". The woman as a *bonga* alludes to her deceitful nature and potential as a witch. If convinced that his wife in the capacity of a witch is consuming him a man will say: "I have a *bonga* but a rice-eating *bonga* in my house." The statement alludes to her eating not rice but the blood of the man.

Metaphorically, the sexual organs of women are called *bonga* because they are supposed to attract the desire of the deities. For that reason, women are forbidden to climb the roof, the consequent exposure enticing *bonga* to rape them and to provoke trance in them. On the other hand, all my female informants assured me that *bonga* are very sweet.⁴¹ More generally, when Santals speak about *bonga*, they familiarly call them *danan pera*, the hidden relatives.

The Santal deities therefore offer a paradox of closeness and remoteness. For the Santals, no strict boundary is found between the mundane world and the world of the deities. The deities are *parom nel* "beyond the sight": they are hidden but they can observe human beings and sometimes borrow human and animal shapes to deceive them.

The relationship between the Santals and their *bongas* is very tight: the *bonga* are everywhere and they leave signs of their presence: omens and threats. They also come to human beings through dreams (*kukumu*) or vision (*rumok*). For some reason, the woman who does not want to get married and the man who is disappointed by his wife get visits from a *bonga*. According to my informants *bonga* are dangerous seducers but here the relationship is asymmetrical: while men sometimes succeed in maintaining a relationship with a divine spouse and often become witch-doctors, women are often taken into the other world and die. Here the relationship between women and *bongas* has the same consequences as incest: it is a passionate but dreadful experience.

According to my informants, it is difficult to resist the seduction of the *bonga* for in such encounters men lose their minds. I have been told this several times and more especially by women. "Bonga seems closer than kin." This paradox of course alludes to Santal eschatology, all human beings become *bongas* thus *bongas* are remote and close at the same time. The closeness of the *bonga* is expressed by the fact they are called *pera*, kin (without any precision). They are the double of human beings, so *diku Bonga* can also be found. These are the *bonga* of Hindu origin: they can be classified, like Hindu men, in *maran diku bonga ko* "big foreign gods", *hurin diku bonga ko* "small foreign gods".

The logic of exorcism displays fully the same dialectic of ethnic boundaries as the one which concerns the representation of non-Santals. Big *diku bonga* or powerful Hindu gods like *Shiva* and *Kali* are worshipped by Santal witch-doctors because they control other minor Hindu deities held responsible for spreading diseases. The whole affair is sometimes more

⁴¹ *Bongas* at first seduce their victims and finally kill them. Sometimes, *bongas* take the shape of human husbands to enter in the houses.

complex as Santal and foreign deities interact as well as Santals do themselves with their neighbours.

A Santal witch may try to offer a cult to a malevolent Hindu deity in order to strengthen her poisonous praises. On the same level, a Santal witch-doctor will worship a high Hindu deity in order to be able to neutralize two kinds of deities: the Hindu small deities *hurin bonga* and the dangerous tribal deities. Here, one can see that the idea is to use the non-tribal gods either to harm or to neutralize harmful deities. Hindu gods are powerful, being the god of the dominant society, but one can try to manipulate them.

The cannibalist feast in the other world

We have perhaps given a dark picture of the *bonga*. They are supposed to be mischievous though one should not forget that they sometimes work at command. If a minor *bonga* works for a more powerful *bonga* — a scheme which evokes the Indian hierarchy — he obeys to the order of his parent's *bonga*.

This last scheme is present in different stories where a young man follows a female *bonga* into the other world. He is introduced to his in-laws who have prepared a feast for him. He soon understands that they are serving him a cannibalistic feast as they have decided to entertain him with human flesh. Having understood the threat, he hurriedly leaves the *bonga* world.

This picture reminds us of the social custom of the son-in-law exploited by his father-in-law, a typical institution of the Santal. Nevertheless, we also hear that the *bonga* are very fond of “eating” the sexual partners of their children; An incestuous pattern where the food code and the sexual codes seem equivalent. If the *bonga* are incestuous kin, some affines who are considered very close — when living in the house — might be called incestuous kin. Such is the case of the father-in-law who tries to seduce his daughter-in-law when his son is working in town. Usually, this ends tragically with the suicide of the daughter-in-law.

The concept of bitlaha: Closeness and remoteness equated

The *bitlaha* is the ceremony which Santals used to exclude both incestuous kin and people who have had sexual relationships with non-Santals. The same punishment was applied to those who had transgressed rules implying a too close relationship (being kin) or a too distant relationship — having

an affair with a non-Santal. In both cases, the ceremony of exclusion was extremely violent and has been forbidden by the British authorities for that reason. A *bitlaha*⁴² was a hunt in which the offenders were the quarry. It was intended to demonstrate the beast — like conduct of the culprits. As W. Archer (1983), who was a Deputy Commission in Santal Parganas, noted, “a *bitlaha* is an *ato bapla*”, a marriage by the village where the villagers were trying to degrade the culprits using symbols of obscenity. Incest — like the breaking of endogamy — is supposed to destroy the social order: the culprits’ houses should be destroyed and their ancestral alters defiled. Sometimes, the ritual included the death of the culprits.

Nowadays, in cases of union between Santal women and Hindu men⁴³ the women’s funeral rituals are performed. They are declared dead in their own society and have to try very hard to get accepted in the caste world. But the rituals of exclusion are also an opportunity to express tribal solidarity through symbols of identity.

Tribal identity as a way to manipulate boundaries

As we have seen, Santal dialectics of closeness and remoteness implies that human beings are attracted by symbolical distance. Incestuous kin are desired because they are taboo, but if by any chance incest is committed, it leads to tragedy.

For the same reason, Santals try to encounter *bonga* even if they know it may end tragically. At a more pragmatic level, Santal society displays a strategic use of boundaries which are expressed in the natural space such as village, forest, burnt boundaries, cultivated boundaries and so on.

Rituals emphasize such boundaries and even the assistant of the village-priest has to sacrifice fowls to “mark” boundaries during agrarian rituals.

The spatial boundaries are projected in the conception of the pantheon — most deities are known by their abode — they are inside or outside a boundary. In that regard the Hindu gods are even conceptualized outside the Santal country, but they are standing at a distance. During exorcism rituals, the whole idea is to keep them at a reasonable distance but they can become the tutelary deities of the witch-doctors who are supposed to be able to encapsulate the Hindu gods in their ritual space of a diagram drawn on the floor. The Hindu gods should not wander, they have to be localized and tied to ritual places.

⁴² For a full description of the *bitlaha* ceremony, see W. Archer 1984.

⁴³ See M. Carrin-Bouez 1989.

Here, again, the dialectic of closeness and remoteness is at work, one can worship a Hindu god in order to use it in the strategy of exorcism. The same idea prevails with the use of *diku*: one cannot avoid them but one should not get involved with them.

A Santal myth portrays the dangerous seduction of a half-Santal and half-Hindu hero, Mandho Sin who, at first, shares both warrior tribal qualities and Hindu ideals. Nevertheless, he later tries to conquer the Santals in order to become their king. But they use a strategy against the foreigner. Seeing the doors of their huts adorned with cows hides, Mandho Singh turns back in disgust. This mythical episode shows the strong resistance of Santals to Hinduization. A large sample of stories written by Santal people at the beginning of this century show us how they tried to keep their Hindu neighbours at a distance and never accepted that Hindu men of any caste abduct their women.

For example, when a Hindu was having an affair with a Santal woman they could perform the *bitlaha* ceremony in the Hindu village, which they did not hesitate to defile.

Strangely enough, the caste associations accepted the Santal custom which — at another level — could guarantee that Santals would respect Hindu ideas regarding caste endogamy. In such a situation, symbolic boundaries shelter a lot of antagonisms. Moreover, the social sanction of *bitlaha* implied a more tragic consequence for the Santals. If they had transgressed the taboo of endogamy, they would never become an ancestor and a *bonga*.

The Santals have been living for centuries with their Hindu neighbours and seem to have preserved their identity by strongly expressing their boundaries. In spite of being dominated economically and culturally they have kept their identity. This does not mean that at times some sections of the Santals have not been trying to “reform”⁴⁴ some of their customs in order to achieve a better status in the local hierarchy of caste.

Nevertheless, traumatic historical events like the Santal rebellion of 1855,⁴⁵ where more than twelve thousand Santals perished, have reinforced their concern for tribal identity and helped them to forge the concept of *diku*.

The foreigner is a kin because he lives in the same area but he cannot be trusted; he will never become an exchange partner in terms of economics or kinship. Economic exploitation is thought in terms of incest. A foreigner will be considered as much a deceiver as any incestuous kin would be.

⁴⁴ See P.O. Bodding 1921.

⁴⁵ For an analyses of the Santal rebellion of : M. Carrin-Bouez 1986.

Avoidance in terms of kinship rules should not be broken to the same extent as ontological remoteness should be not violated: ethnic boundaries and liminal state of existence should not be confused.

The Santals have better resisted acculturation than their neighbours. The mock sacrifice of a foreigner seems to imply that they used to dominate some of their tribal neighbours. Although we cannot answer more precisely that question we can assert that closeness and remoteness seem to be fundamental categories which allow them to think about incest and foreigners. The mock sacrifice of a foreign victim alludes to an incest situation. It is a negative way to incorporate the foreigner within the group and within the pantheon, since we are told that the deities themselves will finish the sacrifice.

Incest is thought of as the inner category which is compared to one's image in water. How does the foreigner become a kin? It is possible that the foreigner category alludes to the affine category. To conclude an alliance with another group makes a kin out of a previous foreigner. This is expressed in the way the Santals allude to the rivalries and fights which were there in the past between the different clans. Such fights between kin were thought as madness, *mirgi* "epilepsy". Though marriage was the rule between the different Santal clans, war made it sometimes impossible. Violence was and still is a threat to alliance and similarly violence is a substitute to an impossible alliance. To a certain extent, the Santals pretend to sacrifice the people who cannot be exchange partners but a Santal marriage song expresses the paradox in its own way as the brother-in-law tells to the elder's brother of his wife: "O foreigner, if you do not find any human victim, you will sacrifice me."

So, affine category expresses the minimal social distance; it is for that reason, for example, that Santal women who have been outside through marriage are no longer allowed to enter in their father "inner" ancestor-room (*bhitar*).

The foreigner, *diku*, who tries to break the taboo of tribal endogamy and seduces a Santal woman behaves like an incestuous kin; he transgresses the social boundaries. Incest and relationships with Hindu are paralleled because both situations pollute the tribal deities, the *bonga*. The Santals evoke the deities as hidden relatives who live in the other world but sometimes come down to deceive human beings. Like the foreigner who tries to seduce Santal women, the deities of both sexes seduce human beings. The deities are incestuous in the other world with their own children, like some affines in this world exploit their son-in-laws. Violence, exploitation and witchcraft are symbolical ways of trying to incorporate the

other, the affine as a close tolerated alien or as a distant double of the deity.

The mock-human sacrifice of a foreigner and the ritual which sanctions incest, in the same way as a union with a foreigner, dramatize the dialectic of closeness and remoteness.

To avoid the danger of being absorbed, the Santals need to represent boundaries at different levels of beliefs, taboo and rituals. The different kinds of boundaries themselves are used to locate the different categories of deities. On some ritual occasions, priests make offerings to the boundaries in order to avoid the foreign deities (*diku bonga ko*) from entering the village.

The foreigner is an incestuous kin because every affine is potentially trying to come too close, as would a real agnate.

The ideal distance where affines should stand as close foreigners is expressed in wedding-rituals where the co-parents-in-law are described as the parallel horns of two pairs of buffalos. In marriage, the emphasis is put on reciprocity which is the opposite of the asymmetrical relationship implied by incest.

On the other hand, incest is parallel to the irruption of foreigners within the tribe or the irruption of deities within the human world.

Dialectic of closeness and remoteness

1. Relationships with human beings

<i>Incest</i>	<i>dopo</i>	<i>Affair with a foreigner</i>
too close	de(p)er	too remote
death	copulate	death, banishment

2. Relationships with *bonga*, "deities"

Love affairs between men and deities	= Incest to neutralize malevolent <i>bonga</i>	Use of <i>diku bonga</i> , "foreign" Hindu gods in exorcism in order
too remote death of human victims		exorcism

3. The mock-sacrifice of a foreigner

The foreigner is captured
in another tribe

The *buru bonga*, “mountain gods”,
will take the human victim in the
other world

use of a remote category

This victim is dedicated to
the *buru bonga*, “mountain gods”, the
closest gods for the tribe.

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Rationality, causality and classification in Santal medicine

In daily life, Santal people interpret illness as a kind of *dukh*,⁴⁶ unhappiness, fatal event. On a global level, illness is conceptualized as a disorder which breaks the harmony, which usually exists between the body, *hormo* and the spirit, *mon*.⁴⁷

The causes of illness are numerous and their description allow us to explicate the Santal theory of causation.⁴⁸ Here, I shall consider that indigenous theories of misfortune do not fit neatly to the usual dichotomy of external causation and supernatural agents.

As anthropologists such as M. Lienhardt (1961), M. Crick (1976), R. Horton (1982), D. Parkin (1985), acknowledge, the dilemma stands between imposing a universal conceptual category, for instance the western concept of "evil" in epistemology, or deconstructing it but rendering it less useful as an analytical tool across diverse cultural contexts. Nevertheless, D. Parkin (1985) reminds us that there seems to be two different ways in which we can compare moral systems. As he says, the first would be to work from the Durkheimian assumption that moral rules are created by and for society. To this Durkheimian view, he opposes a transactional view of morals where the interpersonal links prevail. What is the evil eye in India? To what extent does the evil as an indigenous concept crystallize a host of associations dealing with the supernatural agents held responsible for illness? W. O'Flaherty has traced certain conceptual attitudes towards evil from the Vedic period and she concludes (1976: 376): "One must therefore speak of the Hindu approaches and solutions in the plural, and not of the

⁴⁶ When ever Santal villagers from different villages meet, they ask each other: How is *dukh* and *sukh*, unhappiness and happiness in your village?

⁴⁷ Besides the two concepts which denote the opposition between body and mind, the Santals have a concept of life spirit, *jihu*, which is located in the skull and symbolizes the patrilineal clan. Moreover, *jihu* recalls us of *jiva*, the vital soul in ancient India. As A.L. Basham (1976: 22) puts it: "When these vital factors were operating harmoniously, the body inhabited by the *jiva*, the 'vital soul' as distinct from the inmost soul or *atman* enjoyed health."

⁴⁸ To express causation, several expressions are used in Santali, as for example, *alom botorak'a, ente in' menan'a*: don't be afraid for I am here.

Hindu approach or solution to theodicy." If Hinduism offers a variety of religious experiences, what is the concept of evil eye which prevails in popular Hinduism or in tribal society? D. Pocock (1985: 45) equates evil eye with envy: "The fear of envy is not limited to material goods. It can be extended to a skill or some physical feature such as handsomeness, and thus, those who do not possess such things will be with good reasons jealous."

As R. Horton (1982: 224) suggests, in a given community, there are often differences of opinion regarding the causation of misfortune. These differences may be reflected in the opposition found between levels of knowledge inside a society. According to the structure of the society, the transmission of specialized knowledge can be modelled on an initiation process where, for example, esoteric knowledge can be secretly transmitted between the age-groups, as described for the Baktaman society (F. Barth 1975).

Among the Santal, the transmission of knowledge follows different channels. For example, the ritual knowledge concerning the sub-clan cult is transmitted from father to son, while the ritual knowledge in general is monopolized by two categories of priests: the village-priests who worship the village deities and perform the agrarian rituals and the *ojhas*, medicine-men and witch-doctors.

I shall here follow M. Crick (1976: 115-20) who advocates "deconstruction" in the recasting of belief complexes in considering Santal attitude to illness. In this regard, a semantic analysis of disease categories can provide insight into the indigenous logic of causality.

Nevertheless, I shall not consider how the terminological glosses labelling diseases reflect in themselves the different categories of misfortune. Rather I shall explore the social agents implied in the system of causation, mainly witchcraft.

Looking for the overlapping idioms of causation in belief used to "explain" illness, I shall have to stress that disease is often attributed to the context, the Hindu world, for example.

Before trying to describe the knowledge of disease categories, I shall define the knowledge of the Santal healers, the *ojha*. The medicine-man and witch-doctor is called *ojha*, a term which is also applied to a caste in Central India whose members were formerly the soothsayers and minstrels of the Gond. More generally, the Hindu *ojha* is a member of a caste of

religious mendicants⁴⁹ who are skilled in the art of healing. Here Hindu and tribal notions overlap as people consult Hindu and tribal *ojha* as well. As A. Beals (1976: 184) mentions for South India: "there are a wide range of practitioners including unpaid local healers, saints and religious figures, priests, drug and herb authorities, midwives, astrologers, government doctors, missionary doctors, private doctors and foreign returned doctors." The Santal *ojha*, despite a name borrowed from his Hindu counterpart, is clearly a tribal institution by which the Santal bridge the gap between their own religion, centred around cults to the *bonga*⁵⁰ (Santal deities) and popular Hinduism.

All the Santal *ojhas* trace mythical kinship through the Hindu god Siva. According to a Santal myth, Siva is the father of the first master *guru* and the goddesses Durga and Manasa⁵¹ are his younger sisters. According to a Santal legend, there were once twelve Santal *gurus*.⁵² The first, *ojha*, whose name is Kamru *guru*, receives sacrifice from the Santal *ojhas*. In the myth, Kamru *guru*, sensing his death, tells his nephews to eat his flesh in order to obtain his knowledge, *sid*.⁵³ After his demise, they are disgusted by the idea, and, finally his dead flesh is eaten by his wife only. Thus, in obtaining his knowledge, she becomes a witch. Versions of this myth may differ, but they always stress that witchcraft is a science stolen by women and perverted from its original goals.⁵⁴

At first sight, considering only his relationship to the Hindu god Siva, one may think that the Santal *ojha* has embraced the Hindu creed. Like other Santals, he is still involved in the cult of the tribal deities. The *ojha* also worships some Hindu deities, such as tutelary goddesses⁵⁵ in order to control other minor Hindu gods and goddesses who, being malevolent, may

⁴⁹ The *ojha* is the popular counterpart of the *vaidya*, who is mentioned in the Classical Indian Medicine. It seems that contacts have occurred at an early period between *vaidya* or *vaid* and tribal healers. As A.L. Basham notes (1976: 27) "Some texts advise the *vaidya* to gain knowledge of unusual herbal remedies from herdsmen and forest dwelling hermits" (Susuta 1.36.10).

⁵⁰ The Santals have different classes of *bongas*. The village *bongas* reside in the sacred grove of every village and are generally benevolent. The deities held responsible for diseases are rather wandering spirits.

⁵¹ The Hindu goddess Manasa or the "snake goddess" is often a tutelary deity of the Santal healers.

⁵² They are compared to *yogis*: according to *ojhas*, they possess powers of immortality.

⁵³ *Sid*, or *siddhi*, "religious yogic powers" which are considered to be partly magical.

⁵⁴ As knowledge is denied to women who are prevented to attend most of the sacrifices addressed to the deities.

⁵⁵ The *ojha* dreams of some Hindu goddesses like Kali who become his tutelary deities.

be held responsible for illness. The Santal *ojha* memorizes the description of diseases and the lists of remedies to be applied in different cases. He also knows some healing techniques like massage, or the art of blowing in the patient's ears in order to expel the malevolent deities. The *ojha* is also an exorcist and he masters the ritual discourse,⁵⁶ whenever he intends to threaten, admonish and capture the malevolent deities.

He is *shaman* and as such accomplishes a ritual wandering in order to get back the lost *umul* (shadow) of his patient. But because he is also Hinduized, this shamanistic voyage becomes a devotional⁵⁷ quest towards Hindu tutelary deities.

In order to describe the Santal attitude disease as a system of thought, I shall at first rely on two sets of data.

1. Fieldwork experience⁵⁸ of, and discussions with, Santal *ojhas*.
2. A medical list written in Santali language⁵⁹ by the beginning of the century and compiled by P.O. Bodding (1925)⁶⁰ (I shall refer to it as the medical text).

Bodding taught the Roman script to Santal school-teachers who were his main informants during many years. We know, for example, that Bhuju Murmu from Mohalpari was the main collaborator in charge of collecting Santal folk-tales, customs and remedies. Moreover, Bodding was also interested in remedies and he identified more than four hundred plants used by the Santals. He published in 1925 all the data he had collected on Santal medicine. He states in his introduction: "The Santals look upon illness and disease as something unnatural, and make their own deductions from this proposition." Regarding the way he collected his data, he writes (1925: 405): "I have in many cases received the same information from sources separate and independent in time and place. On the other hand, it has, so far as I can remember thrice happened that *ojhas* have been unwilling to divulge a professional secret."

⁵⁶ The invocation conveys the intention of the *ojha* towards the deity.

⁵⁷ Some Hindu ideals have pervaded the *ojha's* system of reference. He sometimes refers to the relationship to his tutelary deity by using the term *Bhakti* "devotion".

⁵⁸ I have carried out fieldwork among the Santals in Bihar and Bengal and Orissa from 1978-1989.

⁵⁹ This list is to be found in the Santal archives under reference 1469 sm, Oslo University Library.

⁶⁰ P.O. Bodding has compiled the Santal list to which he has added his personal information.

In comparing the Santal medical text with data gathered from my informants as we were attending therapeutic rituals, we find a number of interesting differences. The list does not reflect a hierarchy of categories. My data, while less specific, however, show a hierarchical structure.

The discussion with the Santal *ojhas* and the supernatural causes of disease

The Santal, unlike the Hindus, do not take for granted the influence of stars on health. The most common source of illness is imputed to witches. Women are suspected of being witches and this supposition can be understood since they are still felt to be foreign to their husband's lineage after marriage.

In Santal society, the antagonism between men and women is expressed in witchcraft: women as witches go around at night and sow germs of disease in front of doors. To protect themselves against witches and against the evil eye⁶¹ as an expression of witches' jealousy, the agnatic group and the individual, as well, practise preventive ritual. Similarly, when ancestors are regularly invoked with rice-beer libations, a preventive function with regard to witchcraft is thus implied. Moreover, any individual can invoke a protective deity.

Illness is defined as a situation, *hasu menak*, where "there is pain"

Such a situation can be conceptualized as if the body and the soul were "attacked". The discourse on the cause of disease operates at three levels:

1. the alleged action of witches and malevolent *bonga*
2. the transgression of taboo
3. a theory of pathogenesis and symptoms

⁶¹ *Najom* "evil eye", is expressed through glances or poisonous praise.

The actions of witches and malevolent *bonga*

The *ojha* describe the acts of witches in various ways: they move at night, have inverse biological functions,⁶² are cannibalistic and so on.

Witches are always seen as women who receive training from female elders and are induced to become witches in order to devour their male relatives.⁶³ The power of witches is bestowed by malevolent *bonga* who helps them to fly and to throw their magical dart, *ban*, at their victims. Some powerful witches may command local deities as both categories of supernatural agents overlap.

In Santal society, witchcraft accusations can lead to a dramatic end.⁶⁴ The family of a victim state their suspicion which must be confirmed through a divination process.⁶⁵ Usually, the *ojha* himself does not perform the accusation ritual himself. He brings the matter to another specialist who is exclusively a witch-finder, the *jan guru*.⁶⁶ This latter specialist does not belong to the same village as the suspected witch. He has to confirm his suspicion through possession⁶⁷ and accuses publicly the alleged witch by giving her a slab, a sign of public ostracism which can open the path to violence.

The transgression of a taboo may be a cause of illness. The pregnant women, who are expected to observe various taboos are likely to commit involuntary mistakes. The consequences of such transgressions can be transferred to the child. For example, if a pregnant woman looks at a squirrel (which is taboo) her baby will be born with a deformed mouth. The transgression of some taboo can produce physical and mental disability. Nevertheless, and this is the main point, individuals are not always aware

⁶² Witches have twisted feet, give birth through mouth etc. There is also a strong connection expressed between witches and excrements. Witches are supposed to eat their own excrement. There is a link expressed between the repulsive connotation of witches and the origin of disease.

⁶³ As Santal society is strongly patrilineal, witchcraft implies an opposition between genders.

⁶⁴ The witch is often killed or driven away from the village. Cf. W. Archer 1984 & M. Carrin-Bouez 1986.

⁶⁵ Powerful witches are supposed to be able to "hide themselves away" from the divination process. They create *maya*, "illusion", and neutralize the *ojha's* power.

⁶⁶ Literally "the one who was born *guru*" (master).

⁶⁷ He is feared as a witchfinder. He should not know about a case beforehand in order to avoid to be accused himself of being a wizard.

of the taboo they have transgressed.⁶⁸ The *ojha* will have to include this possibility among the causes of misfortune. Finally, the Santal attribute the origin of some disease to some malevolent deities or *bonga* which live in stagnant waters or in the forest. Such a deity as Nage Era⁶⁹ inflicts leprosy on people who admire their mirror image in ponds, while forest deities cast their shadow on travellers and drive them mad. Malevolent *bonga* who seduce human beings create physical disturbances as well as psychic disorders.

The body image

The *ojha's* knowledge of anatomy is scanty. It is striking that the *ojha* does not develop any analogy between the human body and that of animals.

The body is conceptualized as a rice-husking machine; eating, vomiting and excreting. Besides central organs such as the liver (*im*), "seat of life" the heart and the lungs,⁷⁰ the body is supposed to have openings, *jiv duar*, the "doors of life": ears, nose, mouth and genital organs. In case of infection, the liver as the center of life is invaded by *tejos*, "larvae", which usually reside under the nose. To drive away these *tejos* which provoke disease inside the body, one prescribes the inhalations of herbs to expel the larvae.

Skin (*harta*) and flesh (*jel*) are often alluded to in the etiology of disease and mentioned in symptoms. Blood as a symptom⁷¹ is feared. Somebody who is vomiting blood may have absorbed poisonous rice-beer. Blood in itself does not appear to play much of a role in disease categories. For the Santal, to loose blood, if not controlled, is negative; but to offer blood in the controlled context of sacrifice, may form part of the healing rituals.

⁶⁸ Some important taboos connected with the village deity are well known, but the Santals have to respect a greater number of more particular taboos associated with rituals and specific clans. These later taboos are known but often forgotten.

⁶⁹ This tribal deity who inflicts leprosis is found in the respective pantheons of three *munda* tribes: the Mundas, the Hos and the Santals.

⁷⁰ We can find the same valorization of the liver in Ayurvedic medicine, cf. F. Zimmermann 1989.

⁷¹ Blood as a symptom appears connected with tuberculosis (vomiting) or diarrhoea.

How to establish a diagnosis

When the *ojha*, witch-doctor, is called to the house of a patient, he feels his pulse. This is a "sign", *cinha*, which will help him to elaborate a "hypothesis", *paetar*,⁷² of the disease and its evolution. At this level, there is no necessary relationship between a symptom and a disease category. While *ojhas* do not necessarily allude to "shivering", (*tortora*), it is still the symptom of a feverish state. Some *ojhas* explicitly recognize the relationship; others do not.

The *ojha* does not take into account the observed signs or symptoms, rather the divination process concentrates on the mental recitation of the names of the eventual culprits. Interpreting the spots resulting from throwing mustard oil at a soft leaf,⁷³ he utters the names of the possible culprits. Whenever he encounters a particularly strange spot, he fixes on the coincident name, halting in his recitation.

Thus, while the observation of the patient's body may imply certain physical symptoms, the *ojha* does not tend to take these into account. When he "sees" the patient's body, he alludes to his vision which is strengthened by the mental recitation of a *mantra*,⁷⁴ "ritual invocation".

The Santal medical text

The manuscript written by Santal informants at the beginning of the century describes a large number of diseases and remedies.⁷⁵ In the classification of diseases, one of the most common distinctions applies to the opposition between the body as a whole and the different organs. For example, eye disease is localized, while fever concerns the whole body.

Bodding compiled the data he collected without attempting to analyse their logic. As he writes (1925: 405): "... much nonsense and superstitious matter are found. All this has been kept on account of the anthropological and psychological interest attached to it."

In comparing the list with my data, I wanted to verify the following points:

⁷² A hypothesis or a prognosis.

⁷³ *Sal* (*Shorea Robusta*, Gartn.).

⁷⁴ *Mantras* are supposed either to appease the malevolent deities or to drive them away.

⁷⁵ The most serious diseases are to be treated with various remedies which take into account the evolution of the disease as well as the age of the patient.

- can we find the evidence of a taxonomy or any ordering of the disease categories in the list?
- the list "as a written text" had the advantage of giving us descriptions of diseases and remedies. Were these data still coherent with what one can observe to-day?
- the last question is related to the supernatural causes of diseases. Were more diseases attributed to the action of malevolent deities and witches in the beginning of the last century in comparison with the present?

In my attempt to compare the content of the medical text and my data, I have adopted the following methodological approach:

- the same classes of diseases are found both in the list and my data, though the list does not stress the exclusive or inclusive relationships of a particular disease compared to others.

When discussing with my informants, I noted that they expressed logical inclusive relationships by using the expression: "*aema rokom rua haso menaia*" ("there are many forms of diseases"). When I asked, for example, "*rua ko re tinan pokor am badaia?*" ("how many fevers do you know?"), the *ojhas* could start to describe the sub-classes of fever and so on. Needless to say, the procedures elicited through interviews were completed by attending healing rituals.

The notion of symptom in the medical text

As in Western society, the symptom is a perceptible sign which serves in the recognition and identification of a particular disease. For example, a burning sensation in the chest will be considered as the symptom of *koram hasu*, "pain in the chest". An ulcerated tongue, *jari phutaik*, and *bauri*, "vertigo" will describe a particular convulsion called *tayan bae*, "crocodile's fit".⁷⁶

The symptom, among Santals, may be defined as the sign of an implicit causality. The description of the symptom can include an explanation of the name of the disease: *punde met*, "whitish eye", connotes *punde ros met*, "white infected eye".

Some diseases like rheumatism are related to the influence of the "wind", *bao*, recalling Ayurvedic medicine (F. Zimmermann 1989: 207-231). In this

⁷⁶ Here the patient is supposed to spit out his saliva like crocodile.

Santal medical text, the description of disease is quite precise. Let us take, for example, the description of *gurni*, syphilis: "This disease attacks amoral persons and is inherited by children. The men who engage themselves in relationships with prostitutes catch it. This disease gives little wounds on the surface of genital organs which extend soon to the whole body. The pimples look like smallpox."

The most serious diseases are not necessarily described in much detail. Thus, colera is simply referred to as the "putrid gass which escape from the womb". The evolution of a disease may be described by simultaneity, succession and frequency.

The *ojha*, in his prescriptions, often envisages the eventual complications of the disease. Equally, remedies may be defined by their end results. Thus, in the case of diarrhoea (*maran kutha haso se amsam*) the first part of the remedy stops the flow; the second part is called "in order to stop the abdomen pain". In the case of epilepsy, (*mirgi*), the symptoms (fits) emerge as a factor in itself. This is mentioned on several occasions. The fits are connected with the phases of the moon. Generally, the first attack starts during a full moon, while later fits start on the last day before the new moon.

As such, epilepsy is not conceptualized as a disease but rather in mystical terms; it occurred for the first time after a fratricidal war between the Santal clans. There is no internal symptom of epilepsy except saliva and fits. The epileptic patient is compared to a *mirgi*, "spotted deer", evoking the movements of the animal. The medical text does not investigate the etiology of epilepsy, since epilepsy can result from possession. The spectacular manifestations of epilepsy makes it obvious. The medical text, like the present-day *ojhas*, agree that epilepsy is to be cured by shock.⁷⁷

Exceptions to the rational character of the list include *nason ghao*, the "malefic wound" — a wound inflicted by a magic arrow — which may occur anywhere, at any time. The term *nason* establishes the evil origin of the illness which goes far beyond nosology, and represents an anomaly in the medical text. Informants, too, consider it an exceptional case. Diseases passed over by the medical text rarely have supernatural causes, as the medical text tries to reconstruct an objective theory of causality.

⁷⁷ In case of epilepsy, the patient is to be frightened: he is often shown a strange animal part, for example the horn of a deer.

The non-hierarchical character of the list

The list starts by enumerating minor ailments, like loss of hair and inflammation of the eyes. The four big classes of disease that have been elicited by our informants are also found in the list. But Bodding does not mention the way in which subcategories are constituted within a category. For example, he notes sixteen kinds of fever which are apparently not hierarchised neither according to the degree of seriousness nor to any other criteria. In our data, the class of *rua*, "fever", includes seven important sub-classes: country fever, big fever, small fever, smallpox, fever provoked by *bongas*, and different fevers provoked by jealousy.

Bodding mentions seven classes of rheumatism while our informants today distinguish fourteen classes. They are classified in the three following categories: big rheumatism, infectious rheumatism, and simple rheumatism — which include seven sub-classes. This last example shows that even if the knowledge of remedies has lost some of its original content, a point on which I shall come back later, the medical tradition as such is still very rich.

Under the term *ghao*, "wound", fifty kinds of sores, burns, insect bites and bites of other animals, are included.

On this particular point, my informants seemed to concentrate their attention on *ghao* as "skin disease" (eighteen taxa), while they mention only four kinds of bite. It seems that they were more interested analytically by the kind of rash or eruption observed, and based their classification of this.

Equally the list of Bodding is more specific in the case of convulsion — one may suppose, however, that this specificity is produced by amalgamating the information of a large number of *ojhas*. The resulting classification is:

General convulsions; paralysis of the tongue; tiger or leopard convulsion; spider convulsion; intermittent convulsion; tetanus convulsion; etc.

The differences between the list and my data can be explained by the conditions under which Bodding collected his data, and the different levels of knowledge among the *ojhas*. The Santal informants of Bodding did not make much difference between the name of a disease and the name of a symptom. For example, the expression *koram jaljalok'a*, a "burning sensation in the chest", found in the list is not now considered as a disease category, but as a symptom.

The list draws our attention to the importance of a written list on classificatory processes. Listing implies an effort towards abstraction; it is an ordering of discrete, discontinuous elements removed from the context of daily life. As J. Goody (1977: 102) has put it; “we can see the dialectical effect of writing upon classification — on the one hand it shapes the outlines of the categories one has to make a decision as to whether rain or dew is of the heaven or of the earth; furthermore, it encourages the hierarchisation of the classificatory system”.

Black humoral fevers in the medical text

The medical text does not reflect the choices every *ojha* has to do whenever he diagnoses a disease. The list, concerned rather with classification and memorization, divides the fevers into *pila*, fever where “the stomach is enlarged” like after a good meal. In *maran potea pila*, “big black humoral fever of the intestine” the patient’s stomach is like “a beating drum and his hind quarters get reduced”. Whatever food is forbidden to him, he wants to get it.

The diagnosis of these fevers presupposed a knowledge of anatomy and entails the practice of massage: “When the spleen starts to get painful, there is a pain as the spleen is not far from the ribs. When the pain occurs, it extends to the stomach. When the pain reaches the navel, it gets intense, you suffer from a painful spleen.”

In the medical text, as well as for my informants, the most dangerous black fever is *jaro pila*, “humoral spleen”, a fever which deprives the patient of any strength.

The notion of classes of disease

Classes of disease appear somewhat differently from the fieldwork data. Here, the symptoms do not provide definitions of disease but rather commentaries provoked by illness as an abnormal situation. In opposition to the medical list where the Santal use the Hindi *rog* as a generic term for all kinds of diseases, our informants use the expression *rua* and *haso*,⁷⁸ “fevers and ailments”. This expression being used particularly in the *mantra* which are uttered by the *ojha* to drive away disease from the village.

⁷⁸ This expression labels illness as a generic category. One can also suppose here that a higher non-labelled “taxon” might exist. On the question of covert categories, cf. Berlin, Breedlove and Raven 1966.

During my fieldwork I have worked successively with different Santal *ojhas* in Orissa and in Bengal, attending consultations and healing rituals. The semantic terminology used by the *ojha's* medical system distinguishes four classes of disease, as superior taxa of the classification. According to H. Conklin (1969), P. Kay (1970), C.O. Frake (1961) a taxonomy is a formal arrangement of cognitive categories. These categories are labelled by simple or composed lexical elements: for example, *rua*, a "fever", is a simple lexical element and a generic term while *ucar rua*, an "infectious fever", is a composed term which names a particular kind of disease.

The main classes of disease are respectively:

rua, "fevers"

bat, "rheumatisms"

haso, "ailments, illness"⁷⁹

The first of these classes deals with fever and includes sub-categories labelled in Santali by different names or taxa such as *disom rua*, "country fevers", or *ucar rua*, "infectious fevers". Thus, *ojhas* hierarchize their classification of fevers while no such hierarchization is found in the medical list. (See the diagram showing the conception of fevers in the medical text as compared to how it was conceptualized by my informants.)

Also, while *ojhas* attribute the causation of dangerous diseases to malevolent *bonga*, the medical list reflects an effort to avoid this. Examples are *basonto*, "smallpox", and *maran rua*, "cholera". No mention is made in the list of the action of witches or the effects of jealousy. As in village life, the term "fever", *rua* in the medical text, can label a disease which has not yet been identified. Thus, the term fever alludes both to a general symptom and therefore to the name of a disease. For example, fever can accompany *hanus*, "anemia". Also, the "big fevers", *maran rua*, often accompany a case of possession by a malevolent *bonga* and are opposed to *hurin rua*, the "small fevers", which have only natural causes. This distinction is not mentioned in the medical text, which stresses analytical symptoms and rational explanations rather than causality related to supernatural agents. Nevertheless, the list of descriptions of diseases and their corresponding remedies which are memorized by the present-day *ojhas* aim at rationality as did the medical text written by the beginning of the century.

⁷⁹ *Haso*, "ailment", can also label the symptom of a more elaborate disease. For example, a fever can become a symptom in cholera, but is also a disease in itself.

Let us come to the last theoretical point regarding the Santal classification of diseases as reflecting both an indigenous theory of causation and a system.

If the hierarchical structure is found as an organizing principle of the classification, this implies two points: each taxon or name labelling a disease category has a specific cognitive value, for example: as for us, the pine is a tree, but all trees are not pines, *basonto*, "smallpox", is a "fever" *rua*, but this does not imply that all fevers are called "smallpox". Here, one should distinguish clearly between the taxonomy as a set of named categories and the cognitive reality corresponding to this linguistic frame.

As B. Berlin (1966) has shown it from his study of the Tzeltal plants, unlabelled categories are found at the superior level of the taxonomy. For example, the Santals do not have a generic term to name the plants; this does not mean that they do not possess a conceptual idea about their ecological environment.

Besides covert categories, one can sometimes find emic categories which do not fit into the system. The anthropological literature has given the term "anomalies" to these ambiguous categories such as the casoar, a bird which is conceptualized as a cross-cousin by the Karam of New Guinea (cf. R. Bulmer, 1967). Some authors like D. Sperber have questioned the epistemological status of anomalies regarding taxonomy. Do anomalies result from the taxonomy or are they generated by logical fallacy? Taxonomies cannot cover the whole field of experience; further, as D. Sperber (1975:15) puts it, anomalies result from "contradiction" in the discourse. So anomalies become the terms covering ambiguous categories.

Anomalies

The Santal *ojhas* do not consider that "convulsions", *bae*, are diseases. When I tried to find how they could classify the convulsions, I received the following answer: "convulsions are neither fevers nor illness". Though, convulsions are not conceptualized as diseases, they share some of the conceptual features which characterize the former. Like fevers, convulsions are violent and unpredictable. Like fevers, they can be provoked by witches and malevolent deities. Do the Santal *ojhas* compare convulsions and epilepsy?

Both the writers of the list and my informants agreed in considering that the boundary between convulsions and epilepsy is rather fluid. For example, uncontrolled movement of arms and legs are common in these two disorders; both are considered as possessions.

A main difference exists between the Santal medical list and our data. The former one enumerates a very elaborate list of prescriptions to deal with epilepsy and different kinds of convulsions including madness, *konko*. *Ojhas* turn to exorcism in such cases since madness is not acknowledged as a disease. Rather it stems from the *umul* or "shadow" of a deity, *Konko buru*, "the mad deity living the mountain". In the case of madness, the *ojha* has to capture the deity in a pot and drive her back to the forest.

The last of the anomalies is *banghi*, or "barrenness". Sterility is not considered a disease; rather the malevolent *bongas* or the witches possess the body of the woman (or, more rarely, the man).⁸⁰

In the case of possession, the *ojha* sometimes attributes the cause of barrenness to the "evil eye", *najar*. In most of the cases, the evil glance of a woman (suspected of being a witch) provokes possession. As such, the ritual which is performed in order "to make a new womb" for the woman avoids referring directly to the evil eye. Nevertheless, as we shall see, the ritual is performed at the end of the village street, an inauspicious place where the *sima bongas* live, the "boundaries" deities.

The allegedly barren woman must eat the umbilical cord of a new born baby (or the umbilical cord of a black he-goat) mixed with human or animal excrements.

Evidently, the remedies are analogical and transcend the opposition between human beings and animals.⁸¹ Any animal substance which evokes procreation can be used. The prescription is usually composed of impure foods. It is the only case where the patient has to eat impure human leftovers. Moreover, in case of sterility, my informants are used to perform the following ritual:

First, they exercise the deity and make a little seat out of *soso*⁸² wood, a plant largely used to drive away the malevolent spirits. They buy a new *Konda*, an "earthen" jug and a female garment.

The *ojha* takes the husband and the wife to the end of the village street. The priest turns a spotted fowl around them three times to drive away the mischievous deity who could sit "inside" the body of the couple and make them unable to conceive.

⁸⁰ In principle, both husband and wife can be treated for sterility.

⁸¹ Some animals stand in a closer relationship to human beings because they have a "shadow" (*umul*): in folk-tales, such animals as mammals form a society organized according kinship rules and so on... Moreover, malevolent deities are sued to borrow animal shapes whenever they want to frighten human beings.

⁸² *Soso* (*Dyospyros tomentosa*,1.)

At dawn, the *ojha* pours water over the woman in order to bestow fertility on her. The husband breaks the pot, destroying the "old womb of the woman". In order to get a child, the woman should absorb prolific plants such as mushrooms. Then, husband and wife should get purified and stay chaste for a whole day. They must identify themselves with the primordial pair of ancestors.

After the ceremony, the priest purifies the house of the couple with cow dung. When the woman gets a child, he or she will get the *ojha's* name.

Again, there is no strict boundary between animals, plants and human beings. To eat mushrooms and prolific insects is supposed to help procreation. Moreover, by identifying themselves with the ancestors of the twelve clans, the couple should be able to reproduce. Here again, analogical logic applies, but to behaviour.

We have seen that anomalous diseases, in particular those such as epilepsy, convulsions, madness and sterility are expressed in an analogical idiom. In epilepsy and convulsions, the behaviour of the patient is compared to that of animals.

In sterility, on the other hand, the couple has to get a new fertility by identifying with generation symbols: prolific living beings or images of fertility, the ancestor pair.

If we compare again the medical list and the classification of disease, we can assume that the list operates with dichotomies between external: non-infectious/internal: infectious disease, while the classification of disease is hierarchical and suggests that the *ojhas* proceed by inferences and deductions.

The structure of primitive classification

Starting from a psychological approach to the primitive mind, Hallpike (1979) asserts that primitives classify by concrete association and function rather than taxonomy. According to him these concrete associations allude to different realms of experience such as the forest, the bush, and so on. He thereby embraces the concept of prototype based on sensory images rather than focus on diverse criterial attributes as done in componential analysis.⁸³

Compared to plants and animals, classifications of objects and diseases, as well, present a methodological problem. As S. Atran (1987: 4) has

⁸³ At the horizontal level of the taxonomy, two *taxa* are found to be mutually exclusive as, for example, a oak is a kind of tree, but a tree is not a kind of oak.

noted: "... artifacts fail to meet the deductive and inductive requirements of ranked taxonomies." It is hardly plausible that we induce, say, that tables and chairs are naturally four-legged from the fact they are normally observed to have four legs. The case of a classification of disease is ambiguous, diseases are a special kind of living forms, but their description does not rest on a number of stable semantic features. As C.O. Frake has shown for the Subanun of Mindanao, a disease is also characterized by its evolution so the transformation of a symptom in a disease category is one of the major difficulties. This explains also why symptom and disease are not very well differentiated in the list. Nevertheless, the description of disease categories in the list is precise and aims at characterizing each disease category by a grouping of signs: for example in *kat pila*, "black fever", the spleen is hard while in *hanus*, "anemia", the patient gets emaciated and vomits blood.

All these examples show that the Santals agree on basic definitions of disease categories.

Thus, it is constituted in such a way that a discourse on disease is, inevitably, a discourse on signs. Moreover, these signs have an evolution in time.

The evidence of a taxonomy of disease lead us to reject Hallpike's assumption that primitives are incapable of analysing process "into a series of stages and reversible relations". For example, the Santal *ojhas* may describe the possible development of a disease. The prescription of cholera includes more than one hundred vegetal remedies which have to be given at different stages:

- to quench the thirst in cholera (*hawa dukh se marang odok*);
- to prevent vomiting and suppression of urine;
- for those whose eyes get yellow in cholera;
- to use as prophylactic during the cholera season.

More often, the evolution of a disease is observed through different criteria: the patient is vomiting, blood is passed in his urine, he gets emaciated, etc.

We shall now present the second kind of data produced by the list, the remedies.

Is pharmacopia aiming at rationality?

The vegetal species used in the preparation of the remedies is impressive (more than 300). Nevertheless, there is a constant use of twelve plants

which are also important in ritual. These are connected either with purity, fertility, or the symbolism of ancestors.

The Santal eat around 200 animal species: birds and fowls; goats, pigs, cows and buffaloes; wild game such as tiger, spotted deer, bear and leopard; fish, rats; squirrels; insects; and snakes.

Different parts of the animal are utilized as animal remedies: hair, horn, flesh, blood and fat.

The prescriptions are longer and more complex according to the complexity and seriousness of the disease; they claim to teach them to their disciples, whom they instruct in finding and preparing the necessary ingredients. Nevertheless, their practices to-day are limited to a certain number of options which can be summarized as follows:

- Rheumatism can be treated by anointing the patient with fat and oil.
- The use of plaster for the treatment of fractured bones, *ghao*.
- The examination of the secretions of the body in the case of infectious wounds, dysentery and various other diseases.

The colour of bodily liquids, such as urine or sperm, is often considered; white indicates infection, while blood in the urine indicates dysentery.

The most common way to administer remedies is to make the patient take them with water or alcohol. Several plants are ground together and mixed with water, while others are mixed with flour to make "medicinal" bread or pills. The patient under diet is also given cereals such as paddy or millet. Some impure substance such as human or animal urine and faeces might be prescribed in certain cases.

Comparing the remedies mentioned in the list and the prescriptions my informants were used to prepare, we note that animal remedies have largely disappeared. The forest is receding, while the search for animal products is a time-consuming task for the *ojha*. Some priests catch snakes and prepare animal remedies from the snake's body (bone and fat). They exchange their medicines with some of their colleagues specialized in other kinds of animal remedies. The *ojhas* concentrate more and more, however, on vegetal remedies and rituals of exorcism.

A return to irrationality

While there is a continuity between the list and our data, it is true that the present-day *ojhas* emphasize the use of *mantra* in exorcist rituals. In other words, the reconstruction of causality implied in labelling disease relies either on the observation of criteria and the preparation of medicine or it

leads to the identification of a malevolent *bonga*. More and more *ojhas* choose to fight the malevolent deities held responsible for causing disease to human beings. Without describing healing rituals,⁸⁴ these always involve the capture of the *bonga* who is held to be responsible for the disease.

The various *mantra* uttered for different cures are extremely rich in content and aim at describing the disease situation. By way of the *mantra*, the *ojha* threatens or admonishes the *bonga*, and asks him to leave: "Now, I sacrifice to you, I pour out blood, now I feed the sick man with the fowl's liver so that he may heal."

Strategies

As a system of belief, the *ojha's* medical art, including his knowledge of exorcism, is quite complete, and it involves a patron/client relationship. When an *ojha*, engaged to treat a disease, visits a Santal house, he will be given all the necessary ingredients for sacrifice. In exchange, he will receive some ritual fee which may include the price of his blood offering, as he pricks his chest or his thighs to give his blood in order to appease the malevolent deities. In theory, the *ojha* should not get rich through the exercise of his art: a truth some *ojhas* express by saying that they consider their healing profession as *dhorom*, "duty". This kind of ethic is included in the *bhakti*⁸⁵ relationship that unites them to their Hindu tutelary gods. This notion of an ethic of duty has been influenced through contact with Hindu *ojhas*.

Nevertheless, this principle of *dhorom* does not prevent the Santal *ojhas* from identifying witches by the process of divination. If not sure of the specific witch, they may choose not to identify any; at least they may choose not to state it in public. They may, however, indicate some other *bonga* which is then held responsible. The *ojha* is feared; he may act as an intruder in conflicts. Thus, we understand why some villagers develop alternative strategies, avoiding the power of the *ojha* as the latter is embedded in the witchcraft system. Symbolically, these strategies can be seen as preventive medicine.

⁸⁴ Cf. Marine Carrin-Bouez, 1986.

⁸⁵ The *ojha* feels *bhakti*, "devotional love" towards higher Hindu gods who help him during healing rituals.

The religious vow to protect one's child

Some *ojhas*, following the example of their Hindu counterparts, have established a permanent shrine where they receive patients twice a week. Most of these shrines are dedicated to the Hindu god Siva or to the goddess Kali. At such shrines, the divination process is simplified and the remedies are prepared in advance by the *ojha* and packed in small bags of paper. The patients receive the medicine in return for their offering at the shrine. This kind of consultation does not imply the exclusion of supernatural agents. But they are only evoked when the more traditional remedy has failed. First, one must observe the symptom and, legitimizing it by a quick divination process, give the standard medicine. In case of failure, the *ojha* will come to the patient's house for a more traditional healing session.

The Hinduized Guru

The Hinduized *gurus* explicitly state that they are not *ojha*. They sometimes worship the god Dharmo Thakur. In Bengal, the main shrines devoted to this god are specialized in curing various diseases: venereal disease, asthma, elephantiasis, rheumatism. The priests of these shrines come from the Brahman or Dom castes.⁸⁶ The Santal guru tends to imitate the Hindu Dharmo Thakur priests and have integrated Dharmo Thakur in their pantheon. Like other followers of Siva, they put a *trisul*⁸⁷ to mark the boundaries of the local shrine.

In all these shrines, mothers bring their children in order to make a "vow" (*mansik*). The mother asks the *guru* to bless her child and he ties a consecrated amulet over the navel of the child. In most cases, the *guru* sacrifices a chicken (brought by the parents of the child) and pours a little of the blood on the child's forehead.

In *mansik puja*, the union of man and deity is in the mind (*moner* in Bangali; *mon* in Santali). Here, the family takes a spiritual vow to ensure the child's health. In the last example, the sacrifice as well as the vow are preventive strategies to avert the evil eye, "*najom*", as well as disease.

⁸⁶ Brahmans and intouchables (Dom) compete to act as priests in these shrines. They usually sell massage oils and other remedies and give amulets to the visiting patients.

⁸⁷ *Trisul*, "shivaite trident", symbol of the goddess. Some healers apply a hot trisul to their patient's forehead in order to cure them.

What does this strategy imply from the point of view of reconstruction of the causality of misfortune?

In developing a preventive strategy at a more Hinduized level, some Santal villagers feel that they escape the traditional *ojha*/witchcraft complex without breaking with their own roots.

This strategy is partly unconscious as villagers who have been afraid of witchcraft are not necessarily those who turn to Hinduized *gurus*. In fact, in such districts as Santal Parganas, where Lutheran missionaries have been preaching against witchcraft since the beginning of the century, there is a recrudescence of witchcraft among the non-Christians. The Hindu *guru* represents more an unconscious attempt to find a compromise in order to avoid the pressures of the traditional society rather than the expression of a real choice. Nevertheless, the villagers who visit the shrine of a *guru* may also feel a need to express a personal "devotion" *bhakti*.

One should also stress that Hinduized *gurus* are rather prestigious and that Santals can visit them without losing their tribal identity. On the contrary, to become Christian implies losing one's tribal identity.

To visit the shrine of a *guru*, rather than having the *ojha* come to your house, implies that the illness is not yet serious. In social terms it is like paying a visit to the local dispensary; this does not exclude a visit to the hospital. As A. Beals (1976) puts it: "Identification of the specific illness serves to identify appropriate strategies for treatment, but adoption of particular strategies is dependent upon available estimates of cost of treatment, likelihood of success, and rapidity of cure."

This use of standardized remedies introduces a change in the belief system. There is now a level where sickness does not imply inner causality. The unnoticed omen, the transparent taboo and other mistakes which can produce the wrath of the *bonga*, need no longer be invoked in all cases. The use of a Hinduized *guru* implies a rejection of the *ojha* system. But when the *guru's* standardized remedy fails, he has to recourse to his visions. Thus, moving in the realm of tribal as well as Hindu gods, we are left with the domain of rational medicine.

Therapy, as practised by the Hindu *gurus*, can only be had at the cost of religious conversion. The Santal list of diseases and remedies represents and endeavours towards rationality. In the list, the causality of disease is explained by visible and observable criteria which constitute symptoms. Only the remedies use analogical devices and animal metaphors.

The art of the Santal *ojha* represents a compromise between the use of the list as resulting from a memorization process and of other devices to construct a system of causality.

The process of divination and the potentiality of the evolution of a particular disease may allow the *ojha* to build a whole network of reasons of why the patient is sick or possessed. In certain concrete cases, I have noticed that the family of the patient may disagree with the *ojha*; scepticism and suspicion are part of the system.

Healing rituals become the scene where the *ojha* impersonates the different powers at work in the social conflict which form the context of a particular disease. In some cases, the patient has accumulated so many reasons for being sick that he has little chance of recovery. In other cases, the villagers suddenly became tired of the ponderous process of interpretation, and would kill the *ojha* before he could accuse anybody of practising witchcraft.

The *ojha's* system of knowledge is partly rational, partly dialectic; he must choose where to place the conflict.

The system of the Hinduized *guru* does not deal with sickness as such; rather, it immunizes their followers by making them contract vows and promises to such deities as Siva and Kali. Their symbolic efficacy derives from the vision they receive directly from the great Hindu gods.

So far, these changes show that when the Santal *ojha* is seen to have abused his power, his clients would rather visit a Hinduized *guru*. But implicit in these changes of patronage is the return, ultimately, to irrationality; an irrationality produced, as it were, by inflation in religious interpretation.

The Santal classification of diseases

I. *RUE* fever

I.1. *disum rua* country fever

I.2 *basonto* smallpox

I.3 *bonga rua*

I.3.a *arket* difficult delivery

I.3.b *bonga rua* delirium provoked by a *bonga*

- I.II *Insa rua*
jealousy fever
- I.II.1 *koram haso*
a pain in the chest whenever witches eat the patient' lungs
- I.II.2 *sarsan*
perspiration provoked by a *bonga* who dries up the body of his victims
- I.II.3 *bhalki losom rua*
malaria
- I.II.4 *maran fever*
big fever
- I.II.5 *basonto*
smallpox
- I.II.6 *ambari bonga rua*
a fever which accompanies a trance by *ambari bonga*
- I.II.7 *or rua*
paralysis inflicted by deities on people who have transgressed the taboo on clan exogamy
- I.II.8 *sunipat rua*
pneumonia
- I.II.9 *bhalki losom rua*
malaria
- I.II.10 *murhuc'jom*
leprosy, sometimes conceptualized as resulting from a general disorder of the body. Sometimes provoked by Nage Era, a *bonga* who lives in stagnant water.
- I.II.11 *hurin rua*
small fever

- I.II.12 *aku salu*
stomack's nausea due to irregular eating
- I.II.13 *amol*
indigestion due to excessive eating
- I.III *jada*
dysentery
- I.III.1 *saluj jada*
liquid dysentery
- I.III.2 *sasan jada*
yellow dysentery
- I.III.3 *sagua jada*
green dysentery
- I.III.4 *gorom byana jada*
burning dysentery
- I.III.5 *dak' jada*
fluid excrements
- I.III.6 *ardhangi rua*
fever with freezing
- I.III.7 *sudka rua*
violent pain in the stomach affecting children
- I.III.8 *sukha rua*
bronchitis
- I.III.9 *kasi dama*
asthma
- I.III.10 *hanus rua*
anemia with fever
- I.IV *ucar rua*
infectious fever

- I.IV. *basonto rua*
 smallpox
- I.IV.2 *tunta ucar rua*
 serious case of leprosy
- I.IV.3 *ros rua*
 infectious fever
- I.IV.4 *ros rua lended*
 fever provoked by worms
- I.IV.5 *ros bat rua*
 rheumatism with infection and fever
- I.IV.6 *jel rua*
 fever of the flesh
- I.IV.7 *pila rua*
 black humoral fever
- I.IV.8 *kat pila rua*
 spleen like wood
- I.IV.9 *lar pila rua*
 enlarged spleen with fever and chills
- I.IV.10 *pit rua*
 fever and "the vomit is yellow"
- I.IV.11 *sitka rua*
 post-natal fever
- I.IV.12 *haga sitka*
 fever and dysentery, intense thirst
- I.IV.13 *jolom sitka*
 abdominal pains
- I.V. *rua*
 simple fever

- I.V.1 *akal sakal rua*
strong fever
- I.V.2 *emne rua*
various fever
- I.V.3 *ban chutaru rua*
continuous fever
- I.V.4 *bhalki rua*
high fever when the patient is shivering
- I.VI *pali rua*
irregular fever
- II. *BAT*
rheumatism
- II.1 *maran bat*
big rheumatism
- II.2 *ros bat*
infectious rheumatism
- II.3 *toboka*
very painful rheumatism inflicted by Agni Chandi, a malevolent deity
- II.4 *sitka rua bat*
puerperal fever (after delivery)
- II.5 *ros bat ghao potoka*
infected rheumatism of the feet
- II.II. *bat*
simple rheumatism
- II.II.1 *erkhangi bat*
rheumatism which makes people lame for a while

- II.II.2 *ti janga bat*
rheumatism after walking a long distance
- II.II.3 *ghatit' bat*
rheumatism of the joints
- II.II.4 *ghatia bat*
rheumatism of the joints affecting the knees
- II.II.5 *pit bat*
abdominal cramps which can be provoked by Dain bonga, malevolent spirit who gives orders to human witches
- II.II.6 *bao bat*
rheumatism that one catches by walking in the cold wind
- II.II.7 *suk bat*
rheumatism provoked by obesity
- III. *GHAO*
skin disease, wounds
- III.1 *ghao*
skin disease, wound
- III.2 *gurmi ghao*
syphilis
- III.3 *chucundari ghao*
advanced stage of syphilis
- III.4 *talsa ghao*
chickenpox
- III.5 *potea ghao*
ulceria
- III.6 *nage arej ghao*
infectious skin-disease caught after bathing in a pond. Nage Era, a deity who lives in stagnant water is held responsible.

- III.7 *khasra ghao*
scabies
- III.8 *raput ghao*
fracture of bones provoked by sub-clan deities in case of a transgression of taboo.
- III.9 *lubu ghao*
a muscle is “twisted” and is swelling
- III.10 *ros bat ghao potaka*
infected wound in the feet
- III.11 *met ghao*
eye irritation
- III.12 *lo ghao*
burn
- III.13 *tun ghao*
wound resulting from an arrow
- III.14 *das ghao*
continual itching of the skin
- III.15 *taru landup' ghao*
internal wound of the mouth, the patient cannot speak properly
- III.16 *paethania ghao*
small wounds between the toes
- III.17 *kar ghao*
rash
- III.18 *ger*
bite
- III.19 *tayan ger*
crocodile's bite

- III.20 *bana ger*
bear's bite
- III.21 *kula ger*
tiger's bite
- III.22 *bin ger*
snake bite
- IV. *HASU*
pain, ailment
- IV.1 *hormo haso*
pain in the body
- IV.2 *koka haso*
pain in the armpit
- IV.3 *duku buku*
pain in the loins after sleeping in a wrong position during sleep
- IV.4 *komp haso*
pain in the chest, the patient is coughing
- IV.5 *koram hasu*
pain in the chest
- IV.6 *ti anga haso*
painful legs and arms
- IV.7 *sira jan hasu*
pain in bones and muscles
- IV.8 *lai hasu*
pain in the stomach
- IV.9 *amol lai hasu*
pain in the stomach
- IV.10 *pota hasu*
intestinal pain

IV.11 *datu*
infected urine

IV.12 *bohok' hasu*
headache

Classified list of Santal prescriptions published by P.O. Boddling

Complaints affecting the head, eyes, nose, teeth, tongue, mouth: Disease affecting the hands and feet; bone diseases, various fevers.

Pain in the chest, spleen troubles, oedemas, low vitality, sudden illness.

Madness, atrophy, cancer, anemia.

Pain in the body, muscular pain, rheumatism, hemiplegia.

Epilepsy and fits, cramps and convulsions.

Sores, ulcers; scabies and ringworm.

Measles and smallpox.

Venereal diseases, troubles with the urine, hydrocele.

Stomach complaints, nausea, constipation; diarrhoea, cholera, dysentery, pneumonia.

Impotence, barrenness, diseases before and after childbirth.

Poisoning, rabies.

Wounds caused by animal's bite.

Various fevers mentioned by P.O. Boddling

1. *pali rua*, "intermittent fever" (malaria)

2. *emne rue*, "various fevers"

3. *akal sakal rua*, "ardent fever"

4. *gum gumi rua*, "low fever"

5. *bhalki rua*, "high fever"

6. *ban chutauk rua*, "continued fever"

7. *Lahore sitka*, "Lahore fever"

8. *Pila*, "humoral fevers"

If we compare the list with our data, we can see that the class of data we elicited includes: six "big" fevers, mostly "country fevers" (epidemics), twenty "jealousy fevers" (Insa Rua), eleven dysentery fevers, fourteen infectious fevers, and six simple fevers. The categories labelled by the terms *INSA RUA*, *JADA*, *UCAR RUA*, *rua* and *PALI RUA* correspond to sub-classes levels of the taxonomy. We can see that the term *rua*, used as a generic term for "fever" refers both to "big fevers" or epidemics and to "simple fevers".

Considering the comprehensive list on p. 119 to 132 the roman numeral from I to IV label the four main classes of disease, while the arabic numbers refer to a particular disease inside a category. For example, *RUA I* indicates that the class of fevers is considered as the most serious and important class of disease. The other kinds of fevers are considered as the main classes of disease from a ranking order which has been elicited with my informants. For example, I.I has been considered more important than I.2 and so on. When a category is divided into sub-categories, the sub-category is labelled by a second roman numeral. For example, *insa rua*, "jealousy fever" is a sub-category of fever which includes further categories of jealousy fevers labelled from I.II.1 to I.II.13. When a sub-category is divided into minor further categories of the same level, they are referred to by letters; for example, the fevers I.3 and I.3 b are considered as "equally dangerous".

As one can see, the class of fevers includes more sub-categories than any other class. The last sub-category of fevers *pali rua*, "irregular fever" can sometimes include "big" (*maran*) or small (*hurin*) irregular fevers. The class of *bat*, "rheumatism" shows a clear-cut dichotomy between complex and serious rheumatism. The class of *ghao* "skin disease", shows a clear distinction between *ghao* as "skin disease" and *ger* "bite".

Lastly, the class of *hasu* "ailments" shows a distinction between minor pain in general, and more specific *lac'* and *bohok'* *hasu*, "stomach trouble and headache".

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