

The Anka Ceremony of the King of Puri (India)

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ABSTRACT The article deals with the status of craftsmen in India. It has often been remarked that traditional craftsmen occupy a peculiar position in the caste system. On the one hand they are regarded as always pure and as representatives of the divine architect Viswakarma, on the other hand they usually rank among the lower groups in any given local caste system. The author refers to different attempts to explain this situation. He shows that the reality is more complex than many of these explanations presume and that various categories of craftsmen and their occupations have to be dealt with. Starting with this general critique the author continues to give a detailed description and analysis of one particular festival at the royal palace of Puri (Orissa). The aim is to describe the ideas and values involved in the work of a particular group of artisans, who are responsible for preparing new golden coins at the beginning of the king's year. This material is used in the final conclusion to interpret the high status held by goldsmiths in many parts of India.

INTRODUCTION: THE STUDY OF THE CRAFTSMEN OF INDIA

This paper is the result of 16 months field-work in Puri, a temple town located at the sea of Bengal and widely renowned as the dwelling place of Visnu in his incarnation as Jagannatha or "Lord of the Universe". Originally, I intended to focus solely on the ritual relationships of the king, but while doing research in Puri I became aware of the importance of the artisans and their crafts for the concept of the state. The artisans of India have not drawn much attention by ethnologists and indologists in the past, perhaps because they are rarely mentioned in inscriptions and because their products were regarded as more important than their world-views. An early monography on Indian craftsmen was written by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy in 1909. Drawing on various indigenous sources and personal experiences, he describes the differences between the artisans in the villages, the towns and at the royal courts. He stresses the fact that the craftsmen of

the palaces, especially in the former kingdoms of Sri Lanka, enjoyed the highest status (p. 21-22). He characterizes the society as "feudal", which he understands as an organization in which "the possession of land was the foundation of the king's right to the services and contributions of the people and vice versa." (p. 21)

Arthur Maurice Hocart (1968), also using mostly materials from Sri Lanka (Ceylon), applies a similar explanation in his analysis of the Hindu caste system. To him, "the caste system is a sacrificial organization", in which "the aristocracy are feudal lords constantly involved in rites for which they require vassals or serfs (...)" (p. 17). He regards all occupations as forms of priesthood whose aim it is to remove pollution from the ruler. In return, the king grants land to them for their sustenance. This priestly character of the service castes becomes particularly clear in the case of the craftsmen, who are thought to have direct links with the gods and for whom crafts and rites are conceptionally and linguistically the same (p. 16).¹ As an example, he mentions the potters of South India, who claim to be descendants of Kulalan, the son of god Brahma, and who wear the sacred thread like Brahmins (p. 13). Asking himself for the difference between the Brahmin and the artisan, Hocart makes the important observation that the craftsman is concerned with the physical aspect of creation while the Brahmin puts life into the objects through his knowledge of the mantras.

The ritualistic orientation of the artisans, who follow a Brahmanical way of life, is also the subject of a study by Brenda Beck. In an article (1973) on the right and left hand castes of Konkuru in the Coimbatore District, she comes to the conclusion that in the past the artisans of this region were the leaders of the left hand groups, whose members were usually urban-based, selling their skills and owning capital. In contrast to these "specialists", the "generalists" or the landowners were

classified as right hand castes. They had rights in the soil, depended on agriculture and their allied castes performed ritual services for them. Thus, in opposition to Hocart, Beck argues that the artisans were originally not part of the feudal community. According to her, it was only later, when mobility and social change occurred, that the economic distinctions between specialists and generalists, between capital and land rights became blurred (1973: 391–392 & 404).

Writing on the same subject, Arjun Appadurai criticizes Beck for using a particular constellation in a certain region as an explanation for the general phenomenon of left/right divisions in Indian society (1974: 225–226). To him, the opposition between left and right occurs in different contexts characterized by conflicts between social groups. Using Victor Turner's terminology, he calls the metaphor of the two sides a "root paradigm" whose function lies in the creation of unity in the image of the divided, but single social body (p. 221). In the context of artisan castes, the root paradigm occurred in conflicts arising out of their claims to brahmanical status and not because of economic differences (p. 245).²

Modern ethnography and history is mostly concerned with the artisans of South India, in particular with the Viswakarma caste, which is also called Panchalar or Kammalar caste. Studies on craftsmen in North India are for example Elisabeth Conzelmann's doctoral thesis (1996), which has a whole chapter on the artisans and service castes of Mandi in Himachal Pradesh, and Nita Kumar's book (1988) on the public culture of craftsmen in the North Indian temple town Benares. The general impression derived from a comparison of these works is that artisans in North India do not identify themselves with a comprehensive social category like the craftsmen of South India. While there are various, loosely connected castes of artisans in Mandi and Benares, the Viswakarma caste of South India forms a compact category consisting of blacksmiths, carpenters, coppermiths, sculptors and goldsmiths.

The relationships between craftsmen and other castes are characterized in different ways by modern ethnographers. In a village in Central India, Adrian C. Mayer (1960) observed that some artisans like barbers and potters join with

the Rajputs to form a single group that exchanges *kacha* food (p. 37–38), while others, like carpenters and blacksmiths, form a separate category whose members eat *kacha* only from the Brahmins and are very restricted in their acceptance of *pakka* food (p. 39). While the farmers claim superiority over the craftsmen, who are their dependents, the artisans, especially the carpenter, deny this. They stress the fact that the cultivators can not perform their work without the instruments made by the artisans (p. 75). According to Mayer, some craftsmen have the opportunity to escape from their financial dependency on the landowners by turning to paid labour: "... a carpenter can switch to making only carts and houses, and so get paid in cash for each job." (ibid.). He distinguishes between different contexts and relates cash money to individual transactions and payments in kind (on the threshing floor) to hereditary economic relationships between the craftsmen and the farmer or the village as a whole (p. 71). This leaves the impression that both types of gifts are mutually exclusive.

David Pocock (1962), in an article dealing with *jajmani* relationships, points to the importance of trade and commerce in the relation between artisans and other castes. He comes to the conclusion that artisans have a service relationship with their patrons that differs from the relationship between the *jajman* and those castes, who perform religious services for him. Unlike Hocart, he makes a distinction between the artisans, who provide "ceremonial services" neutral to the values of purity and impurity as well as commodities open to "competition" (ibid.: 85–86), and the strictly religious castes, like barbers and washermen, who have tied, exclusive and status governed relationships with their patrons whose impurities they remove (ibid.: 85).³ Pocock explains the internal ranking of the Viswakarmas with reference to "the degree to which each of them is free to operate in a 'competitive' economic situation." (ibid.: 86) While the goldsmiths are most flexible, the blacksmith and carpenters are usually bound by traditional standards and payments, which are often made in kind (ibid.).

S. C. Dube (1967) stresses the isolation of the Viswakarma castes in a village in Andhra Pradesh. There, the Viswakarmas wear the sacred thread like Brahmins (p. 98), but do not accept food

from them (p. 37). The lower castes, however, reject food from the artisans. The Viswakarma castes also separate themselves ritually, because they employ their own priests for their initiation rituals (p. 118).

In the same way as Pocock, K. David (1977) in a study of Jaffna Tamils in Sri Lanka distinguishes between "bound relations" with an aristocratic code of conduct and "free-willing" relations with a mercantile code of conduct (p. 193–194). He illustrates his point by referring to barbers and goldsmiths, the latter being the representatives of non-bound economic relationships, which do not last long, are established voluntarily, are characterized by non-ceremonial payments and are not stratified.

K. David is criticized by A. Good (1982) for using the false dichotomies. According to Good's analysis, the relations with barbers and goldsmith are both, voluntary and non-voluntary, because both perform a caste-specific duty and the patron frequently has a choice between different households of the same caste (p. 34). A. Good further points out that one should not categorically distinguish between two types of services and their respective payments. In the village he studied, *presentations* to barbers and goldsmith contained "ceremonial" as well as "economic" components (ibid.). He observed that *presentations* of farmers to barbers or goldsmiths fall into two categories: *varattusampalam* (a special category of *sampalam*) and *maniyam* (or *sastiram*) (p. 28–29). The former gift is conceived of as a reward for the actual work while the latter is considered to be a token of honour in respect of the craftsmen's special skills (pp. 24–25). The only difference is that the barber gets *sampalam* on the threshing floor, while the goldsmith, who is not involved in regular *presentational* cycles with his clients, does not. The main point Good makes is, however, that the Goldsmith receives both types of payment, the "bargained fair price" and the "traditional fixed price" and that both are not mutually exclusive (p. 34). A further combination is illustrated by the case of the carpenter, who receives traditional payment (*sastiram* and *sampalam*) for his annual repair work, but who may bargain over the price for a new instrument (e.g. a plough). But even in the context of a "bargained price" a token of honour is usually given

to the craftsman (pp. 27–28 & 34.) Another false dichotomy, according to Good, is the one between groups having fixed and groups having non-bounded relationships. He points to the interdependency of castes caused by the division of labour. In this organization, every caste must have relations of both types: "One should not classify groups into 'bound' and 'non-bound', but situations." (p. 35) Good suggests seeing the household as the basic unit for such classifications and argues against attempts to correlate specific castes with certain orientations.

This, however, is exactly Jan Brouwer's intention in his analysis of artisans in South India.⁴ On the basis of an extensive field-study among the Viswakarmas of Karnataka, he suggests a model of two orientations incorporated in the caste (1995: 174–178). The first, kinglike category is best represented by the blacksmiths and carpenters, who usually rank lowest among the Viswakarmas on the village level. They stress interdependence with each other and the continuity of hereditary relationships with their local patrons. The second, Brahman-like category, consists of the sculptors and goldsmiths, who rank highest amongst the Viswakarma artisans. They try to negate the patron-client relationships by working for the market. Following Heesterman's characterization of the ideal Brahman as a world renouncer, Brouwer sees the attempts of the goldsmith to escape his ritual duties by refusing counter gifts and by working for the value free market, where permanent relationships do not exist, as a form of renunciation. According to Brouwer, the coppersmiths, who on the empirical level are divided into two subcastes, take an intermediate position between these two opposite social models. Despite their different ideals, both orientations do not create conflicts between the castes. Arguing from a structural point of view, Brouwer points out that the two categories are complementary. The first category provides the livelihood for the second by producing various kinds of tools and implements, while the second category gives "universal legitimation" to the first by creating divine images and ornaments used in rituals (p. 178).

To conclude this short discussion it can be said that Hocart's model of the artisans position as hereditary priests of the feudal land lord is too

simple. Amongst the various service castes performing work for kings, landlords, temples or villages we should distinguish the castes, whose traditional occupation is to remove impurities, from those, who create objects, which are images of the universe. The latter are craftsmen working with clay, wood, stone or various metals and often identify themselves with the divine architect Viswakarma. All of them define their work as ritual and provide the patrons with objects of religious or economic importance. Amongst them, we find two orientations, one towards hierarchical hereditary relationships, the other towards the isolation of the market. The first ideal characterizes the relationship between patron and client – or master and servant – and is related to the ideals of the Ksatriya Varna and of the Shudra Varna. The second ideal can also be interpreted in two ways. While Pocock compares it with the function of the traditional trader⁵ (p. 86), Brouwer sees it as an expression of the brahmanical ideal of renunciation. These orientations are either correlated with individual households (Good) or with castes of the Viswakarma category (Brouwer). While some authors (Mayer, David) distinguish between hereditary services and ceremonial payments (mostly in kind) on the one hand and paid labour and bargained prices (mostly in cash) on the other, A. Good insists on the basis of his data that no such clear distinction exists. On the empirical level we find that most artisans are classed as Sudras or Vaisyas by others and that they themselves claim brahmanical status or act like kings or landlords, when they have accumulated wealth.⁶ Some craftsmen may claim brahmanical status, but other castes generally do not accept these claims and continue to consider them as Sudras (S. C. Dube). Often, however, artisans are granted a pure status during their work,⁷ but not in other contexts. This is explained by the expectations of the patrons, who want pure objects, the more so if the product is going to be used in religious contexts (E. Moser-Schmitt). Other craftsmen may join into an alliance with the king or dominant caste (A. C. Mayer) or follow the strategies of wealthy landowners themselves. If certain artisans have close relationships with the king, they are reported to enjoy a higher status than the village craftsmen (Coomaraswamy).

One problem arises at this point. If the artisans do not remove impurities but perform pure rituals and are involved in creative acts, what indeed distinguishes them from Brahmins? Why were their claims to brahmanical status, backed up by the acceptance of a vegetarian diet, the sacred thread and mythologies telling of their descent from gods or Brahmins not acknowledged? Moser-Schmitt argues that it was their lack of power and economical capacities as well as their dependency on the patrons, often Brahmins, who were interested in preserving the low status of the artisans (1982: 82). This argument, however, does also apply to most Brahmins, who dependent on their patrons, often live a miserable life, but still enjoy a higher status than their wealthier masters. I think the solution must be sought on the ideological level. The main point of this article is that the artisans in general represent a category which is closely related to transformation of natural substances into cultural objects. The Brahmins occupy a higher status because they introduce these objects into the social sphere without being polluted by the former, often violent transformation. In this relational sense and in regard of the overall process the artisans are impure (low status) and the Brahmins are pure (high status). The same relational logic does not only structure the relations between Brahmins and artisans but also the relations within the category of the five Viswakarma: the blacksmith is relatively impure (lowest status), the goldsmith is relatively pure (highest status). In contrast to most above-mentioned authors I therefore explain the particular position of the artisans by referring to the principle of hierarchy, which according to Dumont (1980) is the fundamental principle of caste. Impurity is not a singular aspect of an occupation or person but the necessary opposition to purity, which encompasses the whole of which impurity is only a part. In other words, in relation to the overall process, the function of the Brahmin is "pure", the function of the artisan is "impure".

Despite the above-mentioned modifications of Hocart's view, my analysis of the relationship between artisans and other castes is also based on his considerations. I find his characterization of the craftsmen as the "ear of the deity" (1968: 6) and as a priest (*ibid.*) particularly helpful to

understand the relations between the artisans of the palace, the king and the Brahmins I observed in Puri. Although I did not study the different artisan castes of Puri in detail, I came across these relationships in different festivals. In this paper, I will analyze the ritual relationships of the goldsmith during the celebration of the new regnal year. My considerations can, however, not be taken as an attempt to characterize the goldsmiths of Orissa and their involvement in different economic relationships. Instead, my analysis is limited to a very small group of artisans, who work for the king of Puri. But my structural interpretation of their functions in the creation of money may apply to other Hindu craftsmen of India.

THE SUNIA FESTIVAL

For the festival of Sunia, which is celebrated every year in the palace of the Gajapati Maharaja of Puri, four goldsmiths are needed. One lives in Puri and is a temple servant of Jagannatha called Podara. He repairs the golden ornaments of the deities and additionally works for the king, particularly during his marriage and palace festivals. The other three are called Bindhani. They live in the area around Khurda, which was the capital of the kings of Orissa before 1803. They are not temple servants of Jagannatha, but of the king. They have a lower status than the Podara, who is considered to be their chief. Nowadays, only the Podara and one Bindhani participates in the Sunia festival, while the others stopped their services to the king due to reasons unknown to me. For his services the Podara receives a new dress (*dhoti*), some food from the Jagannatha temple (*khei*) and a little cash for his work from the king. This is the standard payment for ritual services in the temple as well as in the palace.

The Sunia festival is celebrated every year in the palace of the king of Puri on the 12th day of the bright half of Bhadra (August-September). On this day, the birth of Visnu's dwarf incarnation, Bamana, is remembered and the installation ceremony of god Rama is repeated. But the most important reason for the king to celebrate Sunia is the fact that the new regnal year called *anka* starts on this day. The reckoning of the regnal years begins anew either with the enthronement of a new king or with the end of the *anka* cycle

after 60 years. The first and the sixth as well as every other year that ends with a six or a zero except the tenth year should be omitted in the time calculation. This time calculation has political implications, insofar as all feudatory kings have to keep their time according to the *anka* years of the Gajapati (Marglin, 1985: 165). In a symbolic way, the overlord thereby controls the activities of all minor chiefs in his state.

Some days before Sunia, the preparations for the festival begin inside and outside Puri. Inside the palace, in the northeastern corner of the courtyard, a Brahmin sets up a post on which a pot is placed upside down. This post is called *anukula stambha* or "auspicious pillar". It is said to remove all obstacles that might occur during the subsequent construction of a temporary hut (*sala*)⁸ which will be the workshop of the artisans. In a village close to Khurda, one of the royal Bindhanis starts to prepare 27 cone-shaped stamps made of iron.⁹ They are locally known as *pua*. The iron base is prepared by a royal blacksmith, but the Bindhani knows the secret of making the small plates which are placed on top of the stamps. On these plates the Bindhani has engraved abstract designs representing different gods. Also prior to the festival the royal woodworkers and painters from Puri called Rupakara and Citrakara prepare 27 wooden tools having the shape and design of a fish as well as 17 small wooden images of important figures from the Ramayana. The potter of the king makes a big clay pot having three holes, representing two eyes and a mouth, at one side, and a small hole at the opposite side. My informants referred to this pot as "horsehead" (*ghoda munda*) or "fireface" (*agni mukha*).

On the morning of the Sunia day, a palace servant places this pot as well as a ritual vessel (*kalasa*) and four wooden pedestals (*kathuli*) in the workshop. On the first pedestal, a winnowing fan and about 90 grams of gold are placed, on the second, the instruments of the artisans like hammer, anvil, scale, stamps, melting pot and fishes, on the third, the 17 images from the Ramayana, and on the fourth, a palm leaf, a writing pin and a painting of Narasimha, Visnu's lion incarnation. Next, the family priest of the king purifies the workshop and invites the gods into the ritual vessel consisting of a clay pot with a

coconut on top. He also invites the gods represented by the artisan's instruments, the wooden images and the painting to enter these specific objects by reciting their mantras and by offering them food consisting of bananas and popped rice. Then, the Bindhani starts melting the gold, which I could not observe, because it is no longer done today.¹⁰ The craftsmen and Brahmins do not remember the techniques in detail, but from the information they gave, the following procedure can be reconstructed. The Bindhani lights the charcoal in a fire pot (*umhei*) which at its bottom shows the sign of a dog. On top of this firepot he puts the above described "horsehead" or "fireface". With the help of a blowpipe attached to the backside of the pot, he kindles the fire. The flames will come out of the "mouth" and the "eyes" of the "horsehead" in a concentrated form. The Bindhani holds the melting pot with the gold into the flames. The melted gold is then poured into an iron bar with four parallel grooves. When cooled down, the gold has the form of four elongated strips, which are cut and moulded into 27 small round pieces.

The next part of the ceremony starts in the afternoon, when the king takes his seat on the throne. He is first purified by the Brahmins in various ways. Then his family priest places the pedestal with the images from the Ramayana in the left corner of the veranda in front of the throne room and performs their consecration, thereby repeating Rama's enthronement as told in the ancient epic. The other three pedestals are taken to the same place by two artisans and one scribe. Similar to the workshop in the courtyard, this place is hidden behind a curtain.¹¹ Like the veil of a woman, the curtain is referred to as *purdah*.

When the Brahmins, scribes and artisans have taken up their specific positions inside and outside the throne room, one of the scribes reads aloud the names of different gods and the number of coins showing their specific designs. The round golden pieces made in the morning are placed on top of the cone-shaped stamps, which are fixed into the wooden fishes. Then, the Bindhani hammers the golden pieces and the Podara checks the quality of the abstract designs imprinted on them. The 27 coins are divided into eight, according to another informant into 14 different categories of gods and their designs. One

after the other, the Brahmins bring the coins of each category into contact with the forehead of the king while reciting mantras. All 27 gold coins are finally placed into a red purse and are then taken to the queen, who resides in the inner part of the palace.

The next event is the gift giving ceremony. A winnowing fan containing a pot for the measurement of rice is placed in front of the king. One of the scribes has a list and reads aloud the names of those persons who are expected to hand over a gift to the king called either *bheti* or *najari*. It usually consists of money, which is placed inside the rice pot. When handing over the gift, everybody has to bow down (*pranam*) three times. The first two presentations are made by a representative of the queen and by the younger brother of the king. The third *bheti* is handed over by a commander (*baksi*) of the king's army. Then follow the gifts from the side of various feudatory kings, royal scribes, tax accountants, artisans and other service castes of the court. As a counter presentation, the king distributes different honours amongst the gift givers.

The last event of the day is a visit to the Jagannatha temple. In the company of his Brahmins and guests the king goes inside the sanctum to receive a *darsan* of Jagannatha, who on this day is dressed like Bamana.

INTERPRETATION OF THE FESTIVAL

I start my analysis of the Sunia festival with the conscious interpretation of the event as found in a poem written by the present spiritual preceptor of the queen, K. C. Raiguru.¹² To him, Sunia is a national festival of Orissa. The Oriyas should not measure their time like other Indians according to the *saka* era. Instead, they should measure time in accordance with the *anka* calculation, which in his opinion has made the Ganga kings renowned all over the world. According to this poem, the time reckoning of the Gangas in *anka* years is still followed by every Oriya, who uses it in their personal horoscopes. After tracing the descent of the present king back to the Ganga family, the author praises their glory, their military power and their faith in Jagannatha, who led them to the victorious war against the southern kingdom of Kanchi. Summing up this poem

one can say that the author associates Sunia with a national time calculation, the heroic past of the present king's dynasty and the devotion to Jagannatha, who is the national deity of the Oriyas. The poem ends with the following proclamation: "Oh, sons of Utkala, today you bow down at the feet of Utkala, because this is Sunia day." How are these political implications expressed in the festival?

In the past, family members, army representatives, tributary kings, tax accountants and palace servants literally bowed down in front of the king, who represented the state.¹³ The money handed over to the king at this occasion is called *bheti*. The word is used for a certain category of gift, which implies an asymmetric relationship between giver and receiver. In the context of Sunia, the gift expresses the superiority of a husband in relation to his wife, of an elder brother in relation to his younger brother, of the chief of an army in relation to his commander, of an emperor in relation to his tributary kings and of a landowner in relation to his peasants, tax collectors and artisans. In sum, *bheti* implies a hierarchy in terms of gender, age and authority. The counter gifts of the king consist of honours in the form of titles and turbans, which often symbolize rights to certain services in the Jagannatha temple. According to my observations, the king himself gives *bheti* only to the gods. As Lynn Bennett in her study of high caste Hindus points out, *bheti* represents the hierarchy of relationships in what she terms the *patrifocal model* (1983: 151). She contrasts *bheti* with another category of gift called *daksina*, which she interprets as "primarily a religious gift given to a Brahman or relative who is one's ritual superior in the *filialfocal model*." (ibid.: 149) My informants also distinguished *bheti* from *daksina*, the latter being received only by those "who have the power to bless", i. e. by Brahmins. During the Sunia festival I observed in 1995, the spiritual preceptors of the king and the queen gave *bheti*. But when asked for the sequence of *bheti* givers, one of the involved Brahmins did not mention this fact, I think because it stresses the superiority of the patron in relation to the priest in terms of political power and economic means.

Bheti usually consists of money, which is a symbol of the wealth produced from the land

that was granted and protected by the king. The money represents the continuous relationship between the king, who conquers, rules and gives land, and his state officials, who receive land, fulfil their duties and give a counter gift to the emperor. This takes place when the linear time of the present king is linked with the glorious past of the Gangas through the celebration of a national, cyclic event. To conclude this discussion of the gift giving ceremony it can be said that it corresponds with what Marcel Mauss has called a "system of total services" (1990: 5–6; orig. 1950), because the giving of *bheti* expresses various institutions at the same time. It involves the family, the priestly order, the army, the political system and the economic organization.

The above analysis has shown that the giving of money recreates social relationships. I will now argue that the creation of money during Sunia is best understood as a regeneration of the overall socio-political order. As Bloch and Parry (1982) rightly argue, regeneration is a relativistic concept. Therefore, we should try to understand, what values the participants of the Sunia festival associate with a renewed Hindu kingdom. This requires a detailed analysis of the objects and rituals involved in the production of gold coins during Sunia.

The different artisans of the palace make 27 iron stamps, 27 wooden fishes and 27 gold coins. What is the symbolic meaning of these objects, their raw materials and their numbers?

Iron is a representation of the goddess Kali. Her characteristics are destruction and creation. This is also the typical aspect of iron weapons and instruments which are said to be incarnations of Kali. During Sunia, the goddess is present in the artisan's tools placed on one of the four pedestals. These iron tools, like hammer and stamps, destroy the original form of the gold and give it a new shape.

To the devotees of Jagannatha, wood is a suitable substance for the creation of idols. Jagannatha, Balabhadra, Subhadra and Sudarsana, the four main images of the main temple of Puri, are made of Nim tree. Wood, especially of flower and fruit bearing trees, stands for productivity. A single piece of wood can symbolize the forest in general, which is seen in opposition to the well-ordered space of the village.

The king should have command over both, the wilderness and the civilized realm. Forests and their rivers are associated with the abundance of plants and wild animals. I interpret the fishes made of wood as symbols of the productivity of these various life forms. This association with fertility, which is an important value for young brides longing for a child and for landowners expecting a rich harvest, makes the fish a frequent symbol in marriage rites and royal festivals.¹⁴

Gold is considered to be a pure substance. It symbolizes the goddess Laksmi, who gives auspiciousness, wealth and prosperity. While the king is seen as a representative of god Visnu, the queen is associated with Laksmi. This is expressed in the game of dice played every year in the temple as well as previously in the palace. In the temple, the opponents are Madhaba and Laksmi, in the palace, they were the king and the queen. According to one informant, Laksmi should win this game, so that she will freely distribute her wealth during the rest of the year. The winnowing fan and the rice pot, which are together used as containers for the *bheti*, are said to be symbols of Laksmi. Gold and wealth belong to Laksmi and are distributed by her. In the same way, every Hindu woman should have control over the budget of her household. This explains, why the queen receives the golden coins produced on the first day of the year: she represents Laksmi and as the king's wife she is in charge of his household, or, in a wider sense, of his kingdom. The golden coins are called *yantra*, i.e. symbolic diagrams attracting gods. When new idols are set up in a temple, *yantra* are placed into their pedestals in order to force the divinity to enter the effigy. According to one Brahmin informant, the coins are themselves gods. We can sum up this symbolic analysis of these objects and their raw materials by saying that each stands for a particular principle of the overall process of renewal. Goddess Kali, symbolized by iron, and the weapons and tools made out of iron represent destruction as a necessary prerequisite for regeneration. The wood stands for the productivity of the forest, the fishes made out of wood for the fertility associated with water. Together they symbolize the fertile powers of nature that make regeneration possible. Gold is the auspicious symbol of goddess Laksmi and

the coins are objects of wealth. Laksmi and the golden coins jointly represent the product of the overall regenerative process. But what is the meaning of the number 27?

The symbolism of the number 27 can best be understood if we take into account the importance Hindu mythology attaches to the number three. In the *Purusottama Mahatmya* for example, the world consists of three parts (XXV, 3–5) and it is influenced by three cosmic processes (III, 23)¹⁵. Every Hindu knows the three main gods, Visnu, Brahma and Siva, who are said to represent underworld, middle world and heaven and who are considered to have the qualities of protection, creation and destruction. On Sunia day, Bamana is worshipped, who according to the legend conquered the world with three strides. The number 27 is the result of the multiplication of three by nine, nine being the sum of three plus three plus three. This corresponds to the order of lunar houses or *naksetra* in the Hindu calendar. In a diagram given by a local almanac, the 27 lunar houses are divided into three groups with nine *naksetra* each. The 27 seven gold coins are placed into a purse having three chambers and they are touched to the king, who is said to have three heads whose eyes can see the past, the present and the future. Along with this focus on the number three, attention is also given to the number four. The local almanac for example equates the 27 lunar houses with the Oriya alphabet. Each *naksetra* is classed with four vowels or consonants. In each group of nine lunar houses we come across four zodiacs, making twelve zodiacs in total. The number four also appears frequently in the Sunia festival. For example, four pedestals are placed in the workshop and four strips of gold are produced. The ideal number of ritual specialists involved in the festival is often four. For instance, there should be four goldsmiths and four vedic Brahmins present in the palace on this day. The latter have four ancient vedic traditions, four clans and four original settlements. We can sum up this symbolic analysis of the numbers by saying that the number 27 encompasses all ideas associated with the numbers three and four and its various additions and multiplication. It establishes relations between notions of time, space and society and thereby becomes an expression of the cosmological order.

We can now understand, how this cosmos can be regenerated. The participants of the festival must find a way to link the powers and qualities inherent in the raw materials with the symbolic classification of time, space and society. The way to achieve this is to change the substance. They have to transform the material into a symbol of the universe and at the same time they must try to retain the qualities inherent in the raw substance. This explains why the work of the artisans is highly ritualized. They are like priests in the sense that they too must establish a link between two separated domains, but unlike Brahmins their main inspiration is not to join the spiritual sphere of the gods with the social world of the humans. Their task is more fundamental in the sense that they create the basic relation between the material universe and the social cosmos. In my opinion, their common function as mediators explains why the sacrifices of Brahmins and the work of artisans resemble each other. For example, the workshop of the goldsmith has certain similarities with the sacrificial pavilions of the Brahmins. Both are located in the northeastern direction, are purified before starting the work and are protected by the lion god Narasimha. Sacrificing a victim can be compared with the melting of the gold. Both are violent procedures that destroy the existing order and change the original form of the natural object. The melting process creates a link between the wilderness and the social world, because the transformed substance is part of both worlds. The same holds for the killing of a sacrificial victim, whose life and some parts of its body is given to the gods, while the rest remains with the humans.

If Brahmins and artisans are united in their function, how are they differentiated? One answer might be derived from the fact that the artisan thinks of himself as a woman when performing his work. One goldsmith told me that his male family members used to wear long hair and that they still interpret the cloth given to them by the king as a female dress, which covers their hair and their breasts. In the overall process, the artisans part is particularly linked to the female power. But since according to Hindu mythology both female and male powers are necessary in any act of creation, the artisan must be linked to a repre-

sentative of the male principle. This, I would argue, is the Brahmin, who introduces the coins into the social world through his Sanskrit verses.¹⁶

Mauss and Hubert (1964, orig. 1898) distinguish three phases in the vedic sacrifice and van Gennep (1986, orig. 1908) identifies a similar syntax in many initiation rites. The making of the gold coins clearly has the same structure. First, in the outer space of the courtyard the original form of the gold is changed through melting. The product has a transitional form, because the designs are not yet engraved on the golden plates. This incomplete product is then taken to a liminal space, the veranda, which is located between the courtyard and the throne room. There, the product is finished through hammering. The complete objects, the gold coins, must now be introduced into the social world. This is the meaning of the delivery ritual, which consists of taking the coins inside the throne room, where they are touched to the king's forehead. According to one informant, this makes the king the owner of the gold coins. However, the introduction into the social world is only completed when the gold is delivered to the queen. Her part of the palace is called "the interior part" (*bhitirada*). Therefore, the festival as a whole stresses the transformation of an original substance belonging to the outside domain of potentially violent gods (Narasimha) and goddesses (Kali) into cultural objects pertaining to the interior sphere of peaceful beings, Visnu and Laksmi and the king and the queen.

We can sum up this analysis of the structure and meaning of Sunia as follows. The festival is a ceremony of renewal. Everything exists in a continuous cycle of deaths and rebirths. At the end of the *anka* year, the kingdom must be reborn. This is achieved in four ways. First, by making everything which is used on this day anew. Second, by using iron tools to reenact the cosmological drama of destruction and creation. Third, by transforming a symbol of auspiciousness and wealth, the gold, into a product of these forces, the money, and by identifying it with the king and through him with the whole kingdom. Fourth, by employing a symbolic equivalence between the gold coins, the pantheon of the gods and divisions of space, time and society to

spread the auspicious qualities of the money to various other orders of the universe. The existence of money is the prerequisite for the giving of *bheta*, which establishes the important social relationships in the kingdom, and relates the parts to the social whole.

CONCLUSION

The particularly high position of the goldsmith in India can be explained in different ways. We can either say that they are claiming to be Brahmins because they have a pure way of living, perform priestly duties at auspicious ceremonies of their patrons and repeat the creative function of Brahma when producing objects for their land owners. Another explanation compares their attempts to escape the dependency on a *yajman* by entering the market with the ideal of renunciation among Brahmins. We can also argue that they imitate the ideal of the traders because unlike the other artisans, who still perform manual labour like Sudras, the goldsmiths often work as moneylenders and bankers.

According to Frederique A. Marglin (1985: 311), there are 21 different artisan castes in Puri which perform regular duties as servants (*sebaka*) of the Jagannatha temple. Some of them are additionally in hereditary relationships with the king, who is seen as the mobile incarnation of Visnu. All these artisans belong to the Sudra category. They are touchable, but Brahmins do not accept water from them.

The goldsmiths of Puri are also classed into the Sudra Varna but, according to Jacob Rösel (1980: 63), they must be considered Brahmins in the context of creating the golden images of the gods. A similar function, the making of divine images in the shape of coins, is performed by them in the Sunia festival. But as Hocart rightly points out, the craftsmen differ from the Brahmins in the sense that they create the physical aspects of the gods, while the Brahmins give life to them through their words. During Sunia, this division of labour is exemplified in the fact that the goldsmiths make the coins, but the Brahmins recite the mantras of the gods when touching the coins with the king's forehead. The goldsmiths of the palace and of the Jagannatha temple can not be considered Brahmins because of their

isolation or market orientation.¹⁷ On the contrary, they, like other artisans, continue to give *bheta* to their patron, who has lost his power position since long. Why? My assumption is that by fulfilling his caste specific duty each artisan is trying to raise his status. By performing rituals for the king of Puri the artisan and his family is linked to the glorious past of the Gajapatis and of Orissa in general. This is particularly the case on the day of Sunia, which evokes national feelings about the royal past.

NOTES

- 1 Both are called *karma*. The Brahmin, when talking about his daily ritual duties, uses the same word.
- 2 Other sources of conflict may be the reason for the application of the same classification in the context of trader castes and untouchables.
- 3 A third category is, according to Pocock, the economic relation between the dominant caste and the unskilled labourers. The occupation of these agricultural labourers is not closed, has nothing to do with the maintenance of the *yajman*'s purity (but with the need for labour) and is not always hereditary. (1962, p. 87 – 89)
- 4 One could argue that Good refers to groups and Brouwer to categories, but this is only partly true. Especially when talking about the goldsmiths and the coppersmiths, it is often not clear whether Brouwer's interpretations concern ideal or factual relations.
- 5 Although he does not mention the expression, he probably refers to the Vaisya Varna or trading function.
- 6 See for example the historical study of Ramaswamy (1985) on artisans in the Vijayanagara empire. He describes how artisans, who acquired wealth in the expanding temple cities, make foundations to temples and buy ritual privileges in the processions of the gods. This resembles the strategies of wealthy landlords and kings of the *ksatriya* varna.
- 7 Already in Manu we read: „nityam suddha karu-hastah“ (The hand of the artisan is always pure) (V, 129)
- 8 Nowadays, this hut is no longer made. Instead, a piece of cloth from the temple chariots is fixed like a wall to separate the working space of the artisans. Another term used by my informants for this place is *chamundia*, which means shade. The same term is used for the workshop used by the carpenters during the construction of the temple chariots.
- 9 Since some years, new stamps are no longer produced. Instead, the old stamps are used every year again.
- 10 Instead, the old coins are cleaned and shortly held into fire. Afterwards, the gold is regarded as „new“ and free from impurities.
- 11 Brouwer describes that blacksmiths always have two workshops, one for the melting of iron ore, the other for moulding the iron. The same principle of

work, which separates two phases of transformation, is followed in the Sunia ceremony. In the courtyard, the goldsmiths melt the gold, on the veranda, they hammer it.

- 12 The author gave me a printed version of the poem.
- 13 Nowadays, only family members and palace servants show their respect to the Raja, whom they regard as the head of their family or as the descendant of a once glorious dynasty.
- 14 See Marglin, 1985.
- 15 I here use the translation by G. Mahapatra, 1979, "Land of Visnu (A Study on Jagannatha Cult)", New Delhi: B. R. Publishing Corporation.
- 16 This might perhaps be compared with the Hindu rituals following the birth of a child. Like the work of the artisan, the part of the mother who gives birth is considered to be impure, but linked to auspiciousness. Similar to the pure Brahmin who speaks the mantras, the mother's father performs a pure duty when he utters a name into the child's ear and thereby socializes him or her in the so-called name-giving ceremony.
- 17 There are other goldsmiths in Puri, who do not have hereditary relationships with either the temple or the palace. They own jewelry shops around the eastern temple gate and are fully oriented towards the market economy.

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