

"On the Road with the Babas" Some Insights into Local Features of Mahima Dharma

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ABSTRACT The paper presents the first results of recent fieldwork carried out in Dhenkanal among ascetics (*babas*) and devotees of Mahima Dharma, an indigenous religious reform-movement in rural Orissa. Through travels with two Mahima Dharma ascetics, rituals as well as local and regional networks were investigated. The research reveals some aspects of the socio-structural features of the new religion upon which the paper will concentrate.¹

MAHIMA DHARMA

Mahima Dharma, literally "the glorious *dharma*," represents a contemporary ascetic tradition of Orissa. It recruits its followers mainly from the rural as well as recently from the tribal population of the region.² The main features of the new religion are ascetism, a caste-denying character and a conception of God that lies between heno- and monotheism.³ Mahima Dharmis worship Mahima Alekh as the highest, unwritten (*a-lekh*⁴), indescribable and only God. Mahima Alekh is conceived to be *sunnya* - the void - all and nothing. This God can only be approached by meditation, an ascetic life-style and ritual practices and is thus opposed to idol worship. The concepts and values go back to the founder of the religion, Mahima Gosvami, who lived at the beginning of the 19th century. His origin is not known, but for his devotees Mahima Gosvami is considered to be the incarnation of Mahima Alekh. According to legends, Mahima Gosvami came from the Himalayas and appeared at Puri in 1826 where he began his religious mission throughout Orissa. For the next 24 years Mahima Gosvami is said to have meditated in the Kapilas Hills of Dhenkanal. There he lived for the first 12 years on fruits and roots of the forest delivered to him daily by a Savoro⁵ Chief. During the following 12 years Raja Bhagirati

Mahindra Bahadur, the king of Dhenkanal, used to supply Mahima Gosvami with a daily portion of milk. After a long period of meditation Mahima Gosvami is said to have started his religious teachings in the Feudatory States of Orissa.⁶

Earlier historical and indological investigations by Eschmann (1978) emphasised that Mahima Dharma is "an autochthonous Hindu reform movement" (*ibid.*: 375) which derives "its criticism of the Hindu tradition directly from the tradition itself" (*ibid.*). Eschmann's main thesis concerns the dynamics of indigenous regional traditions in correspondence with pan-South Asian forms and ideas. According to a recent ethnohistorical research on Mahima Dharma conducted by Dube it is the tradition itself which produces new centres and authorities. Dube found that Mahima Dharma is to be seen as a "transformation of a subaltern religiosity" into "an institutionalised religious order" (Dube, 1999: 98; 125). In this vein, my own research focuses on the socio-anthropological analysis of the living religious traditions of Mahima Dharma in the villages of Dhenkanal which coincide with the region of its origin. Later I will extend my research to the areas of mission in tribal regions.

THE ETHNOGRAPHIC SETTING

The present research was conducted in a small village of Dhenkanal - Jaka⁷ - where one of the mythical places of Mahima Gosvami is situated. In this holy area (*tungi*) two semi-migrant ascetics - so called *babas* - reside from time to time. Through travels with the *babas* the ethnographic encounter was gradually enlarged to several other religious centres in the district. During fieldwork three social categories could be determined:

1. celibatory ascetics (*babas*), the specialised elite of the movement
2. lay householder devotees (*bhaktas*) and

3. devoted lay householder patrons of the ascetics who are simultaneously *bhaktas* as well as local headmen of villages or village-segments.

Mahima Dharma combines outworldly renunciation of the ascetics with *bhakti* religiosity of the householders. This also includes traditional forms of local leadership. My hypothesis is that Mahima Dharma in Dhenkanal should rather be analysed within the framework of concepts of local leadership as a patronage system than within the paradigm of a subaltern discourse, although the popularity of Mahima Dharma amongst the rural and tribal population represents a temptation to do so.

THE CONTEXT OF THE *BABAS*

The *babas* with whom I worked had had twenty to twenty five years of ascetic practice. Until now they have represented the middle strata of the hierarchy within the monastic organisation of Mahima Dharma. The stages of world renunciation begin with the role of a young wandering *tyagi* for about ten to fifteen years. This role then leads to a senior *das*, who as a semi-migrant ascetic maintains a sort of continuous sacred residence for further fifteen to twenty-five years. Finally the role culminates in the position of authority assumed by the most senior *abadhuta samnyasin* who on special ritual occasions only would walk barefoot from his permanent sacral abode.

The monastic hierarchy rests upon a remarkably strong principle of seniority (cf. Table 1)

Ideally every Mahima Dharma ascetic is considered a wandering *samnyasin*. In reality, ascetics differ in terms of seniority and in relation to

religious tasks performed, which make holy men more or less mobile. Mobility and social independence are grounded in the ideal of world renunciation that demands to leave worldly relations tied to the family and the caste (*jati*).⁸ An ascetic will never marry and never come back to the place of his birth. He is considered as socially dead, as a living phantom⁹ who - while physically living - has reached the highest status of religious deliverance, *moksha*. As one who is not "of this world" he is still going out into the world in order to become a ritual specialist of the fire-rituals (*jagya*). He survives only by begging and by his devotion to God. The ascetic ideal of Mahima Dharma is therefore deeply embedded into the traditional Indian ideal of world renunciation.¹⁰

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR THE ASCETICS

Ascetics of all stages *tyagi* to *abadhuta samnyasin*, have to obey the rules of conduct, (*guruagya*) which Mahima Gosvami gave to his followers. The religious duty of the ascetics prescribes to follow 32 rules of conduct.¹¹ The main principle of ascetic life in Mahima Dharma consists in severe discipline. Discipline of mind, body and action provides a framework for ethical and ritual conduct. The *babas* worship the highest and only God Mahima Alekh without interference, they live in simplicity, without property and are devoted to radical trust in god. The rules include strict celibacy, no idolworship, vegetarian diet, daily prayers seven times before sunrise and five times before sunset, no meal after sunset, one meal (*vikhya*) from one devotee a day, a strong restriction not to stay more than one night in one village (and that always outside the house) and, finally, the ritual obligation to perform *jagya* (fire-ritual) for the well-being of the society.

The matrix of the rules of conduct presented above shows some of the idealtypical features of South Asian religiosity; they consist in practices of ritual specialists whose orthopractice is seen as a proof of their deep obeisance to the religious laws of *dharma*.

SHAKTI - THE MIRACULOUS POWER OF ASCETICS

Ascetism as a strict discipline of body and

Table 1: Principle of seniority

<i>tyagi</i> ↓	10-15 years of a wandering period
<i>das</i> ↓	further 15-25 years of semi-migrant existence combined with semi-permanent residence at one place
<i>abadhuta samnyasin</i>	stage of the most senior <i>samnyasin</i> who resides permanently in a sacral abode.

mind represents for the *babas* the main way to deification. For the laymen (*bhaktas*) it means the main religious technique in order to gain salvation in terms of a better rebirth. Ascetics, in contrast to their worldly laymen, will never be reborn. They who in Weber's words could be described as 'religious virtuoso'¹² gain by discipline and control of their body and mind a divine power called *shakti*. *Babas* become acrobats of their spiritual powers. As such they perform miraculous changes: they cause rain, transform barrenness into fertility, make marriage prophecies, ask oracles for reasons of bad luck or illness and give auspicious blessings. In the eyes of their devotees they have risen from human bodies to living gods.¹³ All divine capacities of the *babas* derive from one source: it is the discipline of their body and mind rooted in the radical chastity that creates *shakti*, the principle of divinity. Only the control of their body transforms their biological potentials into a metaphysical power. As metaphysical athletes they achieve the highest and most difficult aim: liberated from the phantom world they will never be reborn. Like Mahima Goswami, the incarnation of Mahima Alekh, they will exhale their existence and transform to the nothingness of *sunnya*. Only gods are absolutely mortal in Mahima Dharma, the humans are caught in the phantom deaths and rebirths of the world.

CENTRE AND PERIPHERY

The institutional and official centre of the monastic organisation is Joranda, a holy city in Dhenkanal. Here, where the most senior *abadhuta samnyasins* are living, the majority of young *tyagis* is instructed.

Joranda itself is polarised between ascetic groups called *Balkadhari* and *Kaupindhari*. These groups occupy their own ritual spaces within the holy city. Originally *Balkadhari* and *Kaupindhari* refer to a differentiation according to the seniority of the *babas*. The oldest *babas* (called *Balkadhari*) are permitted to wear a cover made from the bark of the Khumbi tree only. The younger *babas* (called *Kaupindhari*) wear clothes made of cotton. The main reason for immanent conflicts within and between *baba* groups is found in the violation of the hierarchi-

cal principle of seniority. Thus, the *Kaupindhari* do not consider the *Balkadhari samnyasins* as their senior brothers and so do not respect them in an adequate manner. By contrast the *Kaupindhari* regard themselves as equals and reject any ranking between different spiritual fraternities. Nowadays, such conflicts have reached to the level of court cases. In consequence, many *babas* and devotees prefer to focus on centres lying at the periphery of the Mahima Dharma movement that have become more and more attractive.

According to the devotees, four peripheral centres exist besides Joranda:

1. Kamakhianagar
2. Barampur
3. Joka
4. Angarabanda

These five centres including Joranda are called "*tirthas*" and represent mythical places where Mahima Goswami lit his first fire-ritual (*jagia*). Each one of the places is regarded as a hidden centre. All five centres were controlled by former Feudatory States. Joranda, Kamakhianagar and Joka belonged to the Feudatory State of Dhenkanal; Angarabanda was under the administration of the Hindol king. Barampur had its own political autonomy, at least according to the oral history of the devotees.

Each *tirtha* contains holy relicts of Mahima Goswami, such as, his fire wood, his wandering stick, his flywhisk or his ritual instruments. In addition to these *tirthas*, other holy places exist in the vast rural landscape of Orissa. Among them, Bhima Bhoi's sanctuary - Khalliapalli near Sonepur - is of great importance. Bhima Bhoi, a Khond in origin, as the legends tell, was a mythical blind poet who is regarded as the first enthusiastic propagator and devotee of the religion. His devotion to Mahima Goswami and to his religion has left impressive masterpieces of Oriya literature.¹⁴ But since the place where Bhima Bhoi lived and died does not contain traces and relicts of the founder of the religion, it is not recognised as a *tirtha* by the monastic authorities of Joranda. This point reveals the diversity within the Mahima Dharma movement and the special role of Bhima Bhoi and his followers. Bhima Bhoi's tradition in Mahima Dharma is especially widespread in the former Redhakhol (Rairakhol) State. Bhima Bhoi,

the layman, was here surrounded by his followers in the 19th century. For the theology of Mahima Dharma his poetic compositions gained status as holy books with an obligatory character. They were assembled in collections called "Stuti Chintamani" and "Bhajan Mala." Moreover, Bhima Bhoi's tradition displays an ambivalent character. Since the followers do not respect the authority of Joranda and its ascetics but consider Bhima Bhoi as their main *guru*, the community of Bhima Bhoi represents a separate tradition within Mahima Dharma.¹⁵

This corresponds with a remarkable polycentrality structuring the sacred geography of Mahima Dharma. Even though Joranda represents the official centre where processes of systematisation and institutionalisation take place, peripheral centres still appear as locally autonomous.

SOCIAL PATTERNS OF DEVOTION

Travelling with the *babas* showed that Mahima Dharma is popular mainly amongst the *chasa*-population (peasants) and, to a smaller degree, amongst some craftsmen's *jatis* - such as *badhei* (carpenter) and *gudia* (sweetmaker). It thus displays a specifically rural character. Moreover, the *harijan jatis* are also attracted by the religion. The following social features of the practitioners of the new religion are most widespread:

1. The majority of the peasant devotees belong to rich landowning families.
2. Next to the landlords, most other practitioners own at least some land and are not considered as "poor."¹⁶
3. The practitioners in general have a background of Mahima Dharma tradition within their own male ancestry of the patrilineage.
4. Recent access to education and government services is often combined with an interest in Mahima Dharma.

The last characteristic was especially noteworthy within the *harijan jati*. The roles of Mahima Dharmis can be differentiated into

1. ascetics (*babas*) providing priestly services,
2. ritually active lay devotees (*bhaktas*), and
3. ritually passive "believers" (*visvasi*) who are deeply interested and display respectful atti-

tudes towards the new *dharma* and the ascetics.

I have already introduced the role of ascetic *babas*. By contrast, a *bhakta* is a householder who undergoes *dikhya* - initiation - through which he is bound strictly to follow the rules and ritual duties of the code of conduct. A simple saffron (*geru*) coloured piece of cloth, a vegetarian diet, refusal of alcohol and the gradual adoption of chastity even in marital life are the householder's regulations. For householders, the religious duties consist in the regular performance of *darshana* exercises, seven times before sunrise and five times before sunset. After *darshana* in the evening no meal may be eaten. Moreover, the householder's duty includes service of the *babas* (*seva*) by donating food (*vikhya*) which simultaneously makes him a patron of the holy men. We may differentiate thus between:

1. ordinary "householder patron" of ascetic *babas*; and
2. "institutionalised patrons" who act as patrons of one of the holy mythical places where the *babas* reside temporarily and where the monthly fire-ritual (*chatordosi*) takes place. Such an "institutionalised" patron is likely to be a wealthy landowner whose ritual duties consist in monetary and land donations. For the *chatordosi* ritual which takes place the night before full moon the "institutionalised patron" is obliged to guarantee the amount of nutritional ingredients needed for the ritual, to be distributed amongst the village children on the following morning (*balelila*).

POWER CONFIGURATIONS IN RITUALS

In theory, every villager could be a patron of the fire-ritual provided he could afford a minimum amount of 1000 rupees. This implies a certain amount of wealth which is usually combined with high social status. I found myself in an empirical situation in which the rituals were all patronised by the local ruling elite of wealthy landowners.

Throughout the district of Dhenkanal I could locate only *chasa* landlords who patronised the five *tirthas*. According to historical narratives the *chasa* landlords came to Orissa through the

settlement-policies of petty *rajas*. They administered the newly colonised forests areas.¹⁷ In contrast to the situation prevailing in coastal Orissa where brahmanic bureaucrats assumed administrative tasks (Pfeffer, 1978)¹⁸, the hinterland of Orissa was administered by *chasa* landlords. In return for their administrative work they received land-donations to which rights to the services of the village castes were attached. By owning large amounts of land - that could be rented - and by controlling human labour - that could be requested by the landlords - 'royal' authority was practically represented by them. From generation to generation *chasa* landlords acted as village headmen (*prodhano*). They also were the first firm disciples of Mahima Gosvami. In the hinterland of Orissa one may speak of local ruler's dynasties of *chasa* landlords. The local ruling elite seems to be embedded into the traditional model of Indian kingship and its structure of "little kingdoms" (Cohn 1962; Dirks 1979, Schnepel 1995). "Religious policy" in Indian kingship relates kings to temples and creates political legitimacy by ritual activities (Kulke 1978: 125). The complexity of the "multi-level totality" of the subject certainly can not be approached in this article (Galey 1989: 185; Hardenberg 2000). Still, the fact seems important that Mahima Dharma is very much connected with the descendants of the former local ruling elite. They have continued up to this day the religious worship of their forefathers. A 'royal habitus' of the *chasa* landlord devotees can be described by the following:

1. From the beginnings of the Mahima Dharma movement, their sanctuaries (*akuisyatya mandira*) served to demarcate and symbolise the territory of a *chasa* landlord.
2. The funding of fire-rituals (*jagia*) for the village as well as the long-term mentorship of Mahima Dharma ascetics are religious tasks expected from *chasa* landlord-devotees. The funding of rituals demonstrates the generosity of the ritual patron and in this way legitimates him as a 'good/moral' local ruler.

In recent times, social climbers by education and government services, for instance *harijans*, have made attempts to become ritual patrons. Since the value of ritual generosity is related to high social status, aspirants to social mobility try to imitate the habitus of the rulers. Patronising

a Mahima Dharma ritual is symbolically equivalent to acting as a local ruler. However, the *harijans*'s rights to ritual patronage of Mahima Dharma are limited to monetary donations, food prestations are excluded.²⁰ Since money is an inanimate matter it can not pollute and for this reason can also be accepted in ritual transactions. Monetary capacity in rural India offers the lower castes a new opportunity to enter the soteriological market. Religious salvation can be obtained with monetary donations. With sacrifices of money the accumulation of good *karma* for the next (better) rebirth and salvation is possible, without any differentiation of caste.

SACRED ECONOMY

Monetary donations in the context of Mahima Dharma are indispensable for the performance of *jagia*-rituals. They are thus to be seen in the framework of a sacred economy. Money does not possess a value in itself, but is a medium of exchange as part of the competitive process in which different social sections struggle for "symbolic" and "salvatory capital." "Symbolic capital" relies on the principle of reciprocity that governs transactions of gifts which will come back to the donor in form of social respect or higher social status (Bourdieu 1980: 205-21). "Salvatory capital" depends upon the idea that money will be transformed into "religious funds" which will ultimately influence the fate of the following existence of the self. Thus, money donations circulate in the form of ritually transformed and accumulated capital of salvation. By extending monetary patronage over rituals of ascetic *babas*, *harijan*-patrons gain the same kind of access to salvation as all the higher castes. In this, a reform of traditional Hinduism may be discerned. But in spite of this emancipatory aspect of the "salvatory forms of capital" in the sacred economy of Mahima Dharma, social authority still remains largely with the old patrons. "Symbolic capital" is confined to traditional social and ritual roles within the socio-religious hierarchy of the caste system²¹ and can not be achieved in a different context. Apart from the monetary patronage of the rituals of the ascetic *babas*, the aspirant of social mobility remains "the old Untouchable" for the higher castes in his village.

CULTURE OF POETRY AND ORAL LITERACY OF MAHIMA DHARMA

Amongst the rural population Mahima Dharma enjoys a great attraction as an enlightened reform-movement. This popularity lies in its strong reference to a sophisticated corpus of literature produced by Bhima Bhoi. For all Mahima Dharmis the singing and dancing of Bhima Bhois' poetry is synonymous with education and as such it permits even illiterate devotees to perform and demonstrate an educated literacy.

During the fire-rituals of Mahima Dharma the *babas* as well as the male householders sing in alternating choral groups in a passionate, hymnic way. The sung recitations of religious devotion are accompanied by castanet (*gini*), tambourine (*kanjoni*) and moderate dancing moves. This type of "oral literacy" is used, moreover, as an argumentative and rhetoric aid in religious discussions and for teaching to devotees of diverse background. Mahima Dharmis frequently take recourse to poetical verses while leading theological discussions. They argue by singing the *bhajans* and thus convince their audiences. Since all texts are sung in Oriya and *bhajans* are known since the days of childhood educational differences pose no barrier for participating and performing Mahima Dharma devotion. All those who show devotion by singing, dancing and reciting the poetic verses by memory are equally welcome to the *babas*.

THE SOCIOLOGY OF PRAYER²²

The prayer displays a main role in the ritual practice of Mahima Dharma. The prayer itself is a ritual that consists of several exercises of the body. For *babas* as well as for *bhaktas* religious devotion - *bhakti* - to Mahima Alekh is not only meditated by mental concentration but is especially expressed by the language of the body. On the one hand the sequences of the prayer put together invocations of the name of the God, on the other hand performances of complex crossing of arms and legs. Before sunrise *babas* and *bhaktas* fall down seven times to the earth, before sunset they worship God five times. Falling to earth during prayer is always accompanied by complex physical exercises. The performances

of *darshana* - ritual represent for *babas* as well as laymen a public demonstration of religious orthodoxy and the obeisance to the rules of religious life conduct. The right form of the bodily prayer is synonymous with the "right" ideas of Mahima Dharma. An accurate practice - the orthopractice - of the sequences of the prayer proves credibility and orthodoxy - the "right" rule - within one's own life conduct. In this sense, ascetism in Mahima Dharma means the severe discipline towards the rules of the founder of the religion. The prayer - *darshana* - is considered as hygienic medicine for body and mind. As such, performance of the prayer demonstrates a "moral" - internalised - purity within the individual steps towards salvation. Thus, practices of prayer reveal the antique Greek meaning and etymology of *askesis* as "discipline" which is to be found in the internalisation processes of ascetic ethics in Mahima Dharma.

CONCLUSION

Mahima Dharma is a polycentric religious tradition in which organisational segments exist as locally autonomous units. Heterogeneity is thus the visible feature within the movement. Still, it appears mainly as the religion of the local *chasa* ruling elite. Its recent rural spread and popularity corresponds to a rural process of "*chasa*-isation." Mahima Dharma reveals itself as a *re*-form of traditional patterns of local leadership being closely associated with Mahima Dharma ascetics. On the one hand and in spite of its dogmatic denial of caste, local values of status are re-constructed by the belief-system of Mahima Dharma. On the other hand emancipatory aspects of Mahima Dharma can be shown to exist in "salvatory forms of capital" as part of the sacred economy which is open for all castes. Within the sacred economy Mahima Dharma ascetics initiate a sacrificial "*do ut des*"-model.²³ The monetary gift becomes a "sacrifice of money." The principle of soteriological reciprocity by which the sacred economy is structured is found in the obligatory character of the gift.²⁴ All who have given, respectively sacrificed, gain the right of soteriological regeneration in the next life. Thus, the emancipatory moment lies in the gift/sacrifice of money. This is not tied to the hierarchy of

the caste system. The monetary gift guarantees all donors a soteriological "surplus" in the next life. In this life it facilitates climbing the social status ladder by imitating the habitus of the ruling. A further emancipatory moment is embedded in the culture of poetry and in the *bhakti* tradition of rural Orissa. The poetry of Bhima Bhoi is considered an expression of oral literature and deep religious emotion. Knowledge of poetry or its declamation are taken as synonymous with "education." Performances of oral literacy held during Mahima Dharma rituals provide participants with an equal access to emotional worship and intellectual religious discourses. Emotion and poetry are demonstrated by rhetorical competitions and indicate intellectual investigations on the theology of Mahima Dharma. In this sense, the rhetoric of sung poetry breaks with the traditionally restricted intellectual hegemony of the Brahmins and opens theological discussions to members of all castes.

Finally, the ethics of ascetism in Mahima Dharma are inscribed in the body of *babas* and *bhaktas*. By control and discipline of the body a physical matrix of values of world renunciation is created. In an embodied - internalised - manner the laymen are on the way to a better rebirth and salvation, whereas the bodies of the *babas* already incarnate the human temples of God.

NOTES

1. I would like to thank the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Council) for the generous grant without which the research could not have been conducted. Due to the generous help of Prof. P. K. Nayak, University of Bhubaneswar, the research could have been undertaken. The paper represents the first part results of my fieldwork from September 1999 to February 2000. Further investigations will be completed after the next period of fieldworks. Thus, the paper is to be seen as a presentation of work-in-progress results, not as an abstract of a finished research-project.
2. See: Eschmann 1986 (1978); T.R.B. 1968-9.
3. Henotheism means the belief-system in one highest god and implies the existence of other inferior gods. Monotheism means the belief in one and only god.
4. *a- lekha* being explained to me as "not to write/ unwritten" refers to the every day usage of the religious description. The term itself means in Sanskrit "without writing," "illiterate" indicating a pejorative meaning.
5. Savara - named also Soara/ Saura or Sahara - is the name of a Scheduled Tribe in Orissa. See: Senapati and Tripathy (eds.), 1972: 104. In Dhenkanal the Savara people are especially living in the neighbourhood of the Malaygiri hill (ibid: 48). Beside the Khonds and the Gonds they are representing the aboriginal societies of the district of Dhenkanal (ibid: 422). Dhenkanal city, the capital of the district, is said to owe its name to the Savara Chief called Dhenka. (ibid: 427).
6. For further information on the places of Mahima Gosvamis travelling in Orissa see Senapati, 1972.
7. I would like to thank all my hosts in Jaka, where I profited greatly from the hospitality and kindness of the family of Jagan Mohan Sahu and of the whole village.
8. See Appendix B in Dumont, 1986 (1966).
9. For comparison of the *sannyasin* with the ghost of the dead (*preta*) see Sprockhoff 1980.
10. For further comparison see: Ghurye, 1953; Olivelle, 1992; Michaels, 1998. One contradiction to the classical ascetic ideal in Mahima Dharma could be seen in the fire-rituals (*jagias*) ascetics have to perform. Since the classical *sannyasa* is considered as *anagni*, someone who has left the fire of the household, Mahima Dharma *babas* demonstrate a different attitude towards fire-rituals. All these questions related to ascetism, fire-rituals and variation of the classical ascetic ideal have to be discussed in a separate paper.
11. For detailed descriptions see: Eschmann, 1986 (1978): 394-95 and T.R.B. 1968-9: 50.
12. Weber, 1972 (1922): 327; see also the whole chapter V "Religionssoziologie" (pp. 245-38).
13. The deification of humans to gods reminds one of the classical studies of J. G. Frazer who speaks of similar phenomena as of "god-humans," see: Frazer, 1989 (1922): 131-35.
14. See Mohapatra, 1983.
15. A recent research conducted by Johannes Belz investigates this problem. The results are not yet published.
16. In the rural context land means wealth and social status.
17. Senapati and Tripathy, 1972: 57. It is reported that several settlements took place during the 19th century.
18. I refer to the *śasana* villages studied by Pfeffer, 1986 (1978).
19. The characteristic of ritual and politics in pre-colonial India is emphasised by Kulke, 1978.
20. Food and its transactions represent in South Asian

context a main metaphor for the "pure-impure"-idiom of the caste-hierarchy. On relation of food, impurity, commensality, connubium and caste-hierarchy see Dumont, 1986 (1966) especially chapter VI (pp.168-95); on food, substances, impurity and caste see Marriott, 1968.

21. See Dumont, 1986 (1966).
22. Using this term I refer to the work of Mauss 1968 (1909).
23. See Hubert and Mauss, 1968 (1899).
24. Mauss, 1990 (1950).

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