

Exploring illness.

Notes from recent fieldwork among the Ho.

"If we perform our rituals (bongas) and carry out our duties correctly, we will remain healthy and lead a good life. Diseases always come from outside. So it is to 'the outside' that one must look." This is what a Ho village priest (diuri) explained to me. In his statement 'outside' and defilement were almost synonymous, since he used the Ho expression 'jate-ura' which means to "re-purify anyone or anything which has in any way been defiled" (Deeney 2005: 176).

"Each illness is a reminder of a relationship and each is temporarily satisfied, or blocked off, by the performance of an acknowledgement [a ritual] which addresses itself to that relationship" (Vitebsky 1993: 89).

1. Georg Pfeffer and the ethnography of tribal society

I feel honoured and I am grateful to Professor Deepak Kumar Behera to have been asked to contribute an article to volume 9 of *Contemporary Society: Tribal Studies*. This series has been aptly selected and designed into a Felicitation Volume on behalf of Professor Georg Pfeffer, because the ethnographic description, analysis, and comparison of tribal societies in Middle India and elsewhere have been the focus of his work since 1982. It is in the preceding eight volumes that Pfeffer, his scholars, and those interested in the anthropology of tribal Middle India have published their findings from long-term fieldwork and current research, while so many others got entangled in the subjectivities of postmodern discourses 'forgetting' about or rejecting tribal issues on the way. On the other hand, to this day, a number of contemporary anthropologists prefer to label tribals as the downtrodden, backward, neglected classes of modern mainstream Hindu India, the poorest of the poor that need to be uplifted and modernized. Contrastingly Pfeffer communicates at eye-level. He highlights the multiplex structure and the cultural complexity of the *tribal societies* of Middle India in which, according to him, all native inhabitants of the hilly regions constitute a kind of permanent symbiosis (Pfeffer 1997).

Georg Pfeffer has been my anthropology teacher and the supervisor of my doctoral thesis. I can tell from my own experience how he was able to inspire his students, how he was able to make us work hard in order to understand what anthropology was about, what tribal ideas and values were all about. As a humanist with a fine sense of humour he committed himself to introducing us into tribal universe(s), he introduced us to the multi-faceted options of *Anthropos*.

Last, but not least, it was he who suggested to me to do research on the Ho which I did. It has been a fascinating project, probably a never-ending story, which added a whole new dimension to my life.

2. Exploring illness

The focus of my article about Ho understandings of what it means *to them* to fall ill and how to become well is embedded in the portrait of a Ho village headman (*munda*), Sadurgon Kondangkel, whose son falls seriously ill and eventually dies. This portrait of an authentic protagonist brings together, as happens in real life, institutions, issues, and aspects non-systematically. If tribal values and norms exist in their specificity as well as in their interrelatedness, they must matter and be alive albeit disfigurement and strategic distortions of sorts at the empirical level where Ho people plan and live their lives, where Ho have to cope with deviations from the norms, with diseases and death. So the portrait is supposed to tell a story that is larger and more comprehensive than a solely private one. It is given in the third chapter. Some preliminary remarks will offer some orientation.

The ethnographic report of Sadurgon Kondankel is based on field notes and data collected in the course of my fieldwork among the Ho of Mayurbhanj/ Orissa and the Chaibasa area in Jharkhand between 2006 and 2012. The Ho are a large tribe of about one million people ethnically and linguistically linked to the Munda, the Santal, the Juang and the Sora.

I became Sadurgon's elder sister; his son was my younger brother's son, my *homon*. I spent a lot of time with them over the years and got to know them fairly well. Maybe after and because of the publication by Manohar in 2009 of my book on death rituals of the Ho in the village of which Sadurgon is

headman and my continuous return visits people have obviously realized that I keep being seriously interested in understanding their culture. They have welcomed me in their lives after making me part of their kinship. I stayed with them in their houses, and I worked with them. In participant observation I learnt how illnesses, most importantly the causes of illnesses and also how adequate therapies were negotiated, explored rather, often publicly, often within a kinship and village context. It took me some time to shift my attention away from my dominantly Western medical idiom and to realize that the premises and aims of Ho healing practices are different.

When someone is considered ill in Ho country, it is a matter more complex than providing medical aid for an individual's physical body. Our Western notion of a person as a social isolate, as an *in-dividual*, a separate entity, functionally complete in her-/himself, may allow for that. A Ho person extends outside. As a *dividual* s/he is rather defined in terms of other persons including one's ancestors, affines, kin, also one's gods - just as other persons are defined in terms of multiple others including her/him. Diseases are conceived of as having been caused or affected by and within the web of relationships that Ho persons believe themselves to be constituted of and liable to. An illness is not conceptualized as an organic event only. The state of a Ho's health is seen as the result of what people rightly and correctly *do* or do not do, how they interact with others¹ or are 'interacted upon' by others in a world, as was explained to me, in which a universal 'order of things' permeating the entire cosmos is assumed (Reichel 2009: 13).

Bugi is the Ho term for healthy. Deeney offers the denotation "good; to heal; to treat well, to be kind to; pass.- to get well" (Deeney 2005: 52); *hasu* carries the meanings "sickness; pain; to feel sick; to feel pain; [...]trans.- of a spirit, to inflict sickness; intrans.- to be sick, pass.- to become sick" (ibid.: 146). Thus, due to the Ho's strong causal reasoning and due to a whole universe imposing itself and its givens on an empirical individual, the healing of a socially constructed Ho person's illness primarily requires social responses and solutions. They do not exclude biomedical treatment as a matter of principle, as the portrait of Sadurgon's son will show; however, for the above

¹ see the introductory quotations at the beginning of this text.

given reasons, how should a Ho rely on the limited aspirations of medicalization ignoring the social factors usually protecting, in any case moulding a Ho's existence? This needed to be said, since Ho healing performances are not "an inadequate form of medicine, nor are they some sort of pre-medicine which has not yet succeeded in becoming fully [...] scientised" (Vitebsky 1993:89).

This also needed to be said to explain why I have not treated the medical history of Sadurgon's son as a domain making sense in itself by separating 'the patient' from the overall social context of which he is considered an integral part. I think it was Professor Pfeffer who had referred to Franz Boas in one of his seminars. Boas had pointed out that similar phenomena or elements may carry different meanings, whereas different phenomena may have similar meanings. Phenomena can only be understood in context from which they derive their meaning(s). Likewise seemingly similar symptoms from which Sadurgon's son was suffering will surely be found elsewhere. However, the meanings and understandings attached to the symptoms (resulting in diagnosis and therapy) will surely differ. They are culture-specific. In the Ho case this is a constantly developing explorative process of aspects that a person's well-being may be affected by. In a hit and miss method - Ho people can be quite pragmatic and very down - to - earth - the causes and the treatment of an illness, especially if it is a severe one as in the case of Sadurgon's son, are explored by exploring a person's 'outside', the relationships, his (social) context. This context includes matters of marriage and affinity, of kinship and seniority, of ancestors, spirits, gods and goddesses, of land and inheritance, of status, hierarchy and equality, of sacrifice and ritual, of purity and reciprocity. All of these are Ho values that materialize, sometimes in quite confusing and seemingly contradictory ways, within an empirical being and constitute a Ho human as a complex socio - cultural person within a distinct Ho universe.

3. Portrait: Sadurgon Kondangkel

Sadurgon Kondangkel's portrait is an incomplete ethnographic mosaic, however perhaps comprehensive enough to throw some light at the context

within which Sadurgon performs his duties one of which is to explore how best to take care of his ill son.

Hard work, rituals (bongas), and witchcraft

"I believe in hard work rather than in spirits, sacrifices, and rituals (*bongas*)". This is what Sadurgon answered in December 2012 when asked if he, too, performed a particular paddy ritual, the *ked bonga*, as many Ho and Santal households did in the area on the occasion of the final harvesting of the paddy (rice) plant (*baba*) in the fields before the threshing on the threshing ground behind the house (*kolom*) began. This came as an unexpected statement since I knew Sadurgon to have performed *bongas* himself in other situations or to have had them performed by others.

In this particular paddy ritual (*ked bonga*) the original source is invoked, the rice mother (*baba engga*) from which all paddy is believed to have come. She (!) is personified in the last sheaves of rice stalks that are left in the centre of one of every landowner's (*gusiya*) rice field. By the stalks being ritually cut *baba engga* is assumed to have been killed, and she is ceremoniously carried home by young children, boys and girls, on their heads and worshipped and ritually greeted in the Ho way (*jowar*) in the threshing grounds of the respective landowners. She is asked to guarantee future fertility and growth of the rice grains to be sown in a few months. Symbolically, rice grains referred to in the course of this ritual are also personified. They are constructed as offspring of their mother (*baba engga*) and consequently called *babako* (plural of *baba*), to the anthropologist a striking phonetic parallel to *balako*, the term to denote the category of affines. For Santal and some more sophisticated Ho *baba engga* is identified as Laksmi who, even if considered an alien (*diku*) goddess, after all is a goddess. Linguistically this ritual that is also termed *baba keya ader* (calling back the rice [mother]) is related to the *umbul keya ader* ritual in which the soul (*umbul*: shadow, soul) after a person's death is ceremoniously called back into the sacred part of the kitchen (*adin*) in order to be worshipped there. Notions of life, continuity, and reproduction link both rituals - conceptually and linguistically - and reveal at the same time in terms of

reciprocity that only in case proper ritual treatment is offered the continuation of life and reproduction can be expected.

"You know, Eva", Sadurgon had confided in me in 2010, "Ho people may be innocent and pure, but sometimes they know so little; they are so ignorant, and they have forgotten so much about our Ho traditions." Was there a note of despair in his voice? "They easily believe what others tell them. That is why many believe in witchcraft and witches. I think this is blind faith, and there is no proof for it. I believe only in what can be proved. So I believe in our Ho Gods and Goddesses."

Now, who is Sadurgon?

Sadurgon is a Ho², a member of the Ho tribe, a husband and father, a village headman (*munda*) who owns land, house, and cattle (*gusiya*), a cultivator of his own fields (*taso ho*), sometimes he is one who works for wages (*nalatani:*), and a friend. I met him for the first time in January 2006 when he was asked to mediate a discussion of some significance concerning a widow's and her four young children's future following the first burial of her husband. He invited me to participate. Ever since then I could rely on him as informant and, if his little time allowed, as assistant. I became his *aji* (Ze: elder sister), he was my *undin* (By: younger brother), and he and my husband were *teya* (ZeH/ WBy: elder sister's husband/ wife's younger brother) to each other which is a joking relationship. Sadurgon's clan (*kili*) is Kondangkel whose members claim and are acknowledged also by non-Ho to be senior, a status ascribed to the *kunt-kati ho*, the descendants of the original settlers of a village and the founding clan of Gara Sai. It was their ancestors who had cleared the jungle in that area. The high status is not a passive attribute attached to a person once and for all. Indeed, it needed to be re-enacted, maintained, deserved, actively achieved by performing one's publicly known social duties: "As first settlers we have been asked since times immemorial to be village priest (*diuri*) and headman (*munda*) in Gara Sai", Sadurgon explained. Gara Sai, of course, is not the official administrative name listed in the written records of the village council, but

² Deeney makes a difference between *Ho* denoting "a man; a Ho; husband" (2005: 154), and *manwa*, "human being; man; mankind" (ibid: 243).

it is the secular and ritual space that is being recognized by the villagers and within which and beyond whose boundaries they organize and structure their kinship and marriage relations. As a member of his *miyad mandi chatu*³, the specific Ho institution indicating a person's lines of descent vertically and the extent of his kin horizontally, his relations reach well beyond the boundaries of Gara Sai.

Sadurgon is a highly educated person, although he himself would never admit to that. He can speak and write Hindi, English, and Oriya, he can understand and converse in Santali, and, of course, he is fluent in Ho. One day I went to see him at 5:30 a.m. in his courtyard, as he used to say: "This is a good time to meet because I am not yet working in the rice-fields." He was reading a book about Ho traditions written in *Waran Chiti*, a script that was invented for the Ho language by Lako Bodra. Many usually well-informed Ho people that I met in that area were either unfamiliar with it or disinterested. Those who had heard about it labelled it as the business of some intellectuals in the Chaibasa area. It was certainly none of their business. Sadurgon, however, wrote down the whole alphabet for me in *Waran Chiti* without the slightest difficulty.

As wage labourer (*nalatani*;) he had been in Gujarat, Kashmir, and Bhutan for longer periods of his life. In 2008 he had been working underground with dynamite and other explosives in the course of a construction scheme for the Indian railway in Kashmir. He had earned more than 4000 Rupees a month which equalled 156 Rupees a day and was more than double the official minimum wages for unskilled labour at that time. But, he said, he had worked 12 hours a day. He was well informed about the socio - political situation outside Ho society. He knew about the legalization of the *manki-munda*⁴ system in Jharkhand, but warned against the dangers

³ This is a Ho category relating to the cognates of several generations (Pfeffer 1997: 24; Deeney 2005: 242). It literally means 'people of one rice pot', i.e. those people, dead and alive, who eat or once ate from the same pot and who claim to have descended from a common ancestor. Thus "several generations of bilateral kin beyond the local line of a village acknowledge the same set of ancestors who are collectively remembered in rituals (Reichel 2009: 87). At the same time *miyad mandi chaturenko* is a Ho concept of constructing kinship, affinity, and rules of (non-)marriageability, since you do not marry those who you eat together with.

⁴ Whereas a *munda*'s responsibilities lie with secular aspects of a village, a *manki* is a paramount headman, whose responsibilities lie with a number of villages. The *manki-munda* system in Jharkhand

of *mankis/mundas* having become corrupt, of having lost their independence, integrity, and tribal identity. He knew that it was government policy to seek tribal support for tribal land alienation, that economic progress in terms of mining the mineral rich areas in Jharkhand often spelt destruction of the sacred landscape of tribals and a status at the very bottom of the social hierarchy. He was aware of the determination of the Indian government to assimilate members of the Scheduled Tribes into the Hindu - Indian mainstream. More than anything else, perhaps, he knew about and had himself been exposed to mainstream India's contempt of the tribal world and its values.

Sadurgon did not drink rice beer (*diyan*), usually a must-do in Ho society - especially for a ritual elder, and he did not smoke, usually another cultural must for males in ritual situations. But he would not missionize about this. He did not refuse to drink rice beer in order to distance himself notionally from his Ho fellow-villagers. Verardo (2003) makes exactly this point of conceptual disintegration expressed in contrasting attitudes towards the jungle, ancestors, and the consumption of rice beer as markers of Honess. She writes that those Ho would turn into Munda, i.e. swap Ho clan membership for Munda caste membership who began to feel ashamed of these core Ho values and label them as backward and primitive. They would begin to cremate their dead instead of burying them, they would change their marriage patterns and their commensality rules, they would stop eating meat and drinking any kind of alcohol.

If a ritual situation within the compound of his house so demanded, Sadurgon saw to it that rice beer was there. Some people, though to me amazingly few, were drunk regularly and heavily so, which led to their neglecting their duties and their families at times. What Sadurgon deplored was the weakness of mind, the lack of socially adequate behaviour, rather than the lack of physical control. But he wouldn't despise others for drinking

has become a political institution designed to give the tribal population a legal voice. Many Ho, however, resent *manki-munda* accepting governmental salaries for their customary obligations and allowing themselves to be bribed because of that, as they told me. "How can you take money from someone and stay independent at the same time?"

or feel ashamed. Maybe it was also because of this attitude that Sadurgon was a respected man.

The protagonist as village headman (munda)

Sadurgon became *munda* of Gara Sai when he was still young, inexperienced and ignorant, as he says. "Too many of our elders who knew, have died". One of the knowledgeable elders was his father who had taught and passed on the 'office' of *munda* to his elder brother, who then died quite unexpectedly, while Sadurgon had left for Bhutan, and long before his time. As a matter of cultural logic it then became Sadurgon's turn despite his age, "because the villagers insisted."

When asked about his duties as a *munda*, Sadurgon explained: "I don't perform as *munda*, you know. Nowadays the law has changed. The government does not recognize these institutions in Odisha. There is the village council (*panchayat*) that is in charge. So the posts of village priest (*diuri*) and *munda*, also that of the *sardar* (the headman of a confederation of villages who in Jharkhand is called *manki*) don't exist anymore". This may be a politically correct statement, but it tells only part of Sadurgon's ambivalent story, because, as I realized in the course of my fieldwork, he did perform as *munda*, but was downplaying his role as becomes a ritual elder in Ho society. His own courtyard witnessed a number of significant rituals with him as *munda*, not seldom together with the priest of the Gau community⁵. Behind the house, not to be seen from the road in front and thus protected from other people's potentially defiling gazes, there is what was pointed out to me as a workshop, a sacrificial site (*bonga sare*) facing east. Here the priest of the Gau, respectfully assisted by Sadurgon, yearly performs a sacrifice preceding *Mage Porob*, the first of several grand village festivals, after the harvest is done. Thus in ritual the unity of the Ho and their clients, the herders, is constituted. Also, when in 2010 a *diuri* for the Ho community of a neighbouring hamlet needed to be elected by invoking the gods, it was Sadurgon who opened and moderated the meeting of all male representatives on the dancing ground (*akara*); this is the site where usually males gather to discuss village affairs. "Well, people continue to

⁵ The priest of the herders' community (Gau) referred to himself by the Ho term *diuri*.

come to me seeking my advice. They address and keep approaching me as their *munda*. And if people ask you for help, you comply with their demands, don't you?" When my perception had developed the necessary sensitivity I became aware that someone's wishes were quite often interpreted as somebody's demands, almost commands that were granted where possible thus constituting and strengthening a net of reciprocal social obligations often within a known kinship framework.

*The protagonist as landowner (gusiya) and cultivator of his own fields
(taso ho)*

As a *gusiya* Sadurgon owns and lives in a house that was built by his father's father's father. Despite the fact that this house has been sheltering generations of *mundas* it is not any different from other villagers' houses. It is constructed according to similar principles which are kinship principles beyond architectural or aesthetic reasons which are not neglected. This means: in Ho society brothers live together all their lives. After marriage their wives will move in, too. Residence is virilocal. As his grandfather had a brother, another house was built facing the first and sharing with it the same courtyard. And, of course, with two houses constituting two independent, yet interrelated working units there are two separate threshing grounds (*koloms*), a number of separate hearths, and separate *adins*. Sadurgon's grandfather's younger brother (FFBy) had three sons who all got married. There was sufficient land within this *miyad mandi chaturenko*⁶ and more houses got erected in other close - by hamlets which were not always easily recognizable for me as independent hamlets. So Kondangkel brothers - and their common ancestors - are able to continue living together on ancestral land cleared by the Kondangkels. Sadurgon was born and grew up in Gara Sai, where he lives with his wife, and where his elder brother used to live together with his wife. Sadurgon is *iril* to his elder brother's wife, who is his *hili*, which is a joking relationship. According to Ho customary reasoning, after Sadurgon's elder brother's death his wife and her three daughters are entitled to continue living there, which they do. Everything that a husband owns will be passed on to his wife after his death,

⁶ see footnote 3.

but whatever a wife owns, will be passed on in the case of her death to her children - the male ones only.

As *gusiya* of cattle Sadurgon owns two bullocks for ploughing and threshing, eighteen goats or more for sacrificing, selling, and consumption, and a number of chicken and hens for the same purpose. Each different category of cattle is being housed in a respective permanent and separate shed, which are sometimes as spacious as the houses for people, and immediately attached to the houses sharing with these the same roof unless the roof is made of thatched grass.

As *gusiya* of land Sadurgon owns 7, 41 acres that are registered in his father's, his brother's and in his name, but are not separated or divided in the land registrar. This is a common Ho practice, and quite generally Ho will avoid as long as possible the written, legal partitioning of corporate land. An official paper folded, signed and stamped many times shows that Sadurgon yearly pays 16, 45 Rupees instead of 39 Rs as taxes according to Schedule XIV. "Government discount for BPL (Below Poverty Line) people", Sadurgon jokes.

As a cultivator (*taso ho*) Sadurgon works in his own rice fields and helps in the rice fields of the members of his *mandi chaturenko* living in Gara Sai and the close vicinity. This cultivation work is linked to the original ancestors of the particular *mandi chaturenko* whose membership is continually re-established in such corporate activities. In terms of status this kind of work is qualitatively different from wage labour which always means work for others and as such is considered polluting though not always avoidable. Giving help (*denga em*), however, is not considered impure, since it is work done reciprocally among notional equals as a matter of principle, and as such it is never paid. Sadurgon grows rice, and, after harvest, a cultivated pulse (*kansari*), linseed (*unchi*), and a grain of a dal-type (*kalae*). But his specific situation is difficult, as there are no brothers with whom he can organize mutual help right in front of his house door, as it were. His *hili* is busy working in her rice fields, i.e. those of her deceased husband, herding the cattle, getting firewood from the jungle, doing the cooking on

the hearths assigned to her household. There is a division of duties between her and her *iril* fixing separate and shared responsibilities and an internal division of land. Sadurgon and his wife cannot do without wage labourers, who they employ and pay on a daily basis, sometimes in kind, sometimes in money.

Death, polygyny, and the continuity of land

Sadurgon had met death early in his life. Both parents died when he was a young boy. His father had no brothers; his two elder sisters had married into the Alda *kili* and lived in Jharkhand with their husbands and offspring.

His elder brother had died at perhaps the age of 35, maybe some eight years ago, and his elder sister, when she was about 14 or 15 and he still small. He does not recollect the exact year, but in terms of seniority he recollects their ages in relation to his. In both cases biomedical doctors had been involved and had come to their home, so he is acquainted with healing concepts beyond the indigenous ones. "There is a paper with all the details in the *adin*", he said.

Sadurgon lost his only son in July 2011. He had shown symptoms of some undiagnosed neurophysiological malfunctioning (my diagnosis) ever since 2006. By 2009/ 2010 his situation had progressively deteriorated. He had grown immobile and needed permanent care. Both parents took turns. By then Sadurgon was deeply worried, and so was I.⁷ Sadurgon was my younger brother's son, *homon*, to me - was that a relationship term or a living relation? Were my responsibilities abstract and academic or real? When I returned in 2012 the death of Sadurgon's son was one of the first news that reached me.

⁷ So far I had been the anthropologist observing from a relative distance, although in the course of six years I had become emotionally involved. However, this chapter's focus is on Sadurgon and is meant to remain there -and not on the state of the anthropologist's mixed feelings. For this reason these are not enlarged upon here. At the same time it goes without saying that an anthropologist's necessarily subjective perception, interpretation and selection of data will bear on the representation of the chosen protagonist's portrait. Having said this, an anthropologist's understanding of her/his responsibilities (and his/her confusion about them) does affect her/his research in the field, but this will not be discussed here.

In the two preceding years, when consulting and making sense of my field notes, I began to realize in hindsight, on how many different planes and in how many different ways Sadurgon had been active on behalf of his son without my being aware of it at the time.⁸ While performing different kinds of rituals addressed to different kinds of spirits which was his ritual duty on behalf of the whole village, this was not unrelated to taking care of his son. All steps were negotiated within the frame of kinship and the ritual specialists of Gara Sai. This seems more than a model of extreme interpersonal solidarity which it may also be. In the concept of a Ho person defined as a social category, an individual opens up into the outside comprising the collectivity of his *mandi chaturenko*, the cosmos of influential spirits, ancestors, Gods and the residential site of his hamlet. The successful treatment of a disease/ a diseased person requires all components to be considered adequately on the household and the village level.

Revealingly, this showed in one *bonga*⁹ called 'burying of medicine' (*red topa*) in the course of which medicine was given or rather buried (*topa*) in the soil of the hamlet at five different spots where five different spirits were invoked along the ritual boundary surrounding Gara Sai which until then had not been known to me. That way a ritual fence was constituted around the village in order to ward off malign spirits and evil opinions. The *bonga* was not directed towards Sadurgon's son as an autonomous individual, but to a human being as someone related to an encompassing social whole. The ritual itself was witnessed and accompanied by eighteen male Ho representing the complete ritual village. It was carried through by five male village specialists chosen for their divining qualifications. Women and children were not present and not supposed to watch - but for the female anthropologist under the special protection of Sadurgon. The procedure took 35 minutes from 22:30 to 23:05 during New Moon in March 2010. It was a duty to be done by known actors in known - trial and error? - ways. There

⁸ One way of supporting his son was not to commit himself to being my permanent assistant although he appreciated my work and began seriously considering to write a book on Ho traditions himself – in *Waran Chiti*.

⁹ Actually these were at least three interrelated *bongas*. Here only one part of *red topa* will be given.

was nothing secret or mysterious about it. I was informed about the names and specific qualities of the sixteen spirits and Gods¹⁰ that were invoked in the course of the rituals, about the ingredients of the medicine administered to the village which I was allowed to photograph, about the *bichar* (judgment; to pass judgment)) procedure the night before.

As a sort of complementary measure Sadurgon had made an appointment with the biomedical doctor in the nearest town only to find out that he had left for a congress. His assistant asked him to go to Cuttack for an X-ray and charged 100 Rs. for this 'consultation'. The trip to the doctor had been an ordeal for the son. Sadurgon, however, paid and did not complain. He then asked me to get in touch with a renowned hospital in Jamshedpur. When I did, the receptionist remarked, very friendly, very clear: "You'll see. We may make an appointment, no problem, but he will not come. Tribals don't come." She was right; in the end he did not go. But it was not at all an easy decision. He had discussed with his son's *mamu*, his wife's brother, before - as matters of disease were as a matter of course also kinship matters. How to get his son there, who was going to accompany and stay with him, where to stay, how to prepare the meals and how to pay. By no means was money the main concern. Sadurgon gave his son costly, special food that was recommended to him, he gave him medication. He kept trying to find out the cause of the disease - inside and outside the physical boundaries of his son's body. In Ho reasoning there is strong causal thinking: no effect without cause. Were relations, were spirits negatively affecting his son, were they adversely affecting the whole hamlet and had chosen to punish his son? Sadurgon had become a wage labourer in order to cover the expenses for his son outside Ho territory. He is aware that this might have offended his ancestors. In other words: he himself might have offended the ancestors, who were now punishing his son for it. That way he might be the source of their anger and the cause of his son's disease. Maybe he had imported some pollution from outside, and he considered it his duty

¹⁰ At least in this context the boundaries between spirits and gods seem blurred. All were given to me as male gods, *pat* in Ho which denotes "a *guru bongga* type of spirit, usually found in mountains and called upon by shamans for help in discerning what spirit is causing some sickness, etc." (Deeney 2005: 284).

to purify the dwelling site and become purified himself¹¹. He had been in touch with biomedical doctors, he had had meals prepared and eaten outside his home, all of this possibly polluting behaviours. Ancestors whenever annoyed needed to be pacified. This was the shaman's (*dewa*) job. He was called for, not only once, not always the same. After a *bonga* Sadurgon was always quite optimistic. "The correct thing has been done. Everything will be alright now." In between the *bongas* he was carefully watching his son for a few days. If he couldn't observe any improvement he would try something else, he would try someone else. He also tried a Ho *dewa* who claimed to be in touch with Hindu Gods and Goddesses and thus be extraordinarily powerful. During all of this time Sadurgon's son was fed, washed and oiled regularly, he was spoken to and entertained; he lay on a bed on the threshing ground in the shade surrounded by *baba*, ancestors, and people working; his maternal uncle (*mamu*) came visiting frequently - after all it was a three-hour ride on his bicycle one way.

In December 2012 I talked with Sadurgon about his future. What would happen to his land now that his son had died and that his *hili* had no sons? He was prepared for that question. "I think of marrying a second time. I have already spoken to my wife, to my father-in-law, and my *mamu* about it. They all agree." What about the process of finding a second wife? "I will leave that to my relatives according to Ho customary law. They will look. I am not doing that myself. If I have another son, he will take all of the land." Of course, he is very interested in what piece of advice his *teya* has for him.

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¹¹This was not really exceptional. Other Ho, who had been outside Ho territory for the same purpose of earning money, had to undergo purification rituals on their return, too. One Ho told me he was almost treated as an outcast by his own brothers (*hagako*). He was not allowed to touch the *mandi chatu*, and commensality was interrupted. He had to make special offerings to his ancestors in order to become re-integrated into his clan.

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