

Correspondence – Field Research in Central India

Eva Reichel / Georg Friedrich Pfeffer

2009 - 2010

Letter 1 – 23 October 2009

Eva Reichel to Georg Friedrich Pfeffer

Subject: Arrived

Dear Doctoral Supervisor,

The doctoral candidate is doing astonishingly well—at any rate, I am doing my very best, which is not particularly difficult given all the support that is coming my way here.

First of all: matters with Manohar are now completely concluded in every respect. Complimentary copies have been sent to the various journals (ironically, those for Uwe's *Suedasieninfo* were returned), and the financial matters were settled politely and correctly without any further claims—very pleasant. Five days after my arrival in Delhi, following a warm meeting with Deeney in Tata (he is mentally fine, and I think the idea of having some of his publications edited may keep him going; overall he was very pleased with my book and with his contribution to it), I was already in my village.



1. For two months, this will be my home during fieldwork with my assistant (and classificatory son), his wife (my classificatory kimin, i.e. son's wife), and many others.

I feel very healthy and strong, while surprisingly many people around me are dealing with headaches, extreme states of weakness, etc., feeling ill—though often they are lively again the next day. I regularly take malaria prophylaxis (chloroquine, prescribed by a local female doctor). I cope very well with the food and can easily do without tea and coffee, which I had thought myself almost dependent on. I am careful not to overexert myself, and the climate is pleasant and not exhausting.

The landscape, which I did not yet know at this time of year, is dreamlike—and I am not exaggerating. I am surrounded by rice fields just before the harvest; I love this green, it reminds me of southern China and Bali.



2. Rice-fields near Santal Sai. 15.10.2009

I fear that it may not have been wise to assume that I could learn Ho in a Santal village. I wanted to compel my assistant to accompany me linguistically, using Deeney's materials, focusing on speaking and listening comprehension. He immediately agreed—but at the same time evades this at every opportunity. That is, often there is no opportunity at all, because I find it devilishly difficult to knowingly let incorrect forms slip from my mouth.

At the same time, people are very interested in me—everyone, young and old. But the more they notice that I am beginning to speak, slowly, slowly, the more they want to teach me Santali, and that does add to the confusion in a 61-year-old brain.

The Santal here have just celebrated Sorae, the great festival which the Ho celebrate before sowing at full moon in February/March as Mage; the Santal celebrate it at new moon before the harvest. I have therefore danced extensively and accompanied rituals, taking notes and carefully photographing them. Even though language acquisition has top priority, I try to participate in everyday life, especially that of the women.

What may become particularly interesting are the (friendship and marriage) relations between Ho and Santal. There seems to be intermarriage between Ho and Santal, although the marriage rules differ. There is overlap when it comes to *sango*.

My *sakin*, both of them, visited several times, and what I had taken to be friendship relations seems to overlap with kinship relations. During shared meals, food and drink were exchanged in such differentiated ways that the boundaries between *haga* / agnates (my *sakin*: Ho; my assistant: Santal; myself: Ho) and *bala* / affines were publicly expressed. Thus tomorrow, as *haga* and mother of my classificatory daughter, I will be included in the marriage negotiations—the very first steps—of my *jaitadi*, etc., etc.

I am writing this because it may make clear that elsewhere I would need a very long time to become so closely integrated into a social network.

I am therefore considering whether it might be worthwhile to examine this crisscrossing of tribal borderlines more closely.

The computer is excruciatingly slow, so I will stop here. You may sense that my stay promises to become anthropologically productive, even though I do not yet have a clear focus.

With warm greetings,

Yours,

Eva Reichel

Letter 2 – 23 October 2009 : Georg F. Pfeffer to Eva Reichel

Dear doctoral child,

All of this sounds wonderful. Clear focus is not necessarily advisable, because antennae directed in all directions will surely still bring many pleasant surprises. The Ho–Santal convivium is also a noteworthy topic, since both enjoy high status in the regional context.

In short: keep going!

Among the many assorted business cards, I have also found the following from the Yunnan acquaintance:

Dr. Vijay Shankar Upadhyay

Professor

UGC Centre of Advanced Study

Department of Anthropology

Ranchi University

Ranchi – 834 008

Residence:

Manda Colony

Harisingh Road

Morabadi

Ranchi

Phone: +(91) (651) 542994

Just in case.

At the moment my attention is focused on Ingold's hunter-gatherers (for teaching) and Pfeffer's Punjabis (for a Berger–Heidemann volume), but your people interest me much more.

Best,

Georg Pfeffer

Letter 3 – 11 November 2009

Eva Reichel to Georg Friedrich Pfeffer

Subject: Re: Arrived

Dear classificatory father,

many thanks for your kind and encouraging letter.

Today and tomorrow I am in Rairangpur and therefore connected to the internet. I wish you knew this region and that I could draw on your experience and, from time to time, have the opportunity for a kind of mental–anthropological stocktaking.

First of all: I am healthy, and I am getting along well with my family. Life is quite comfortable—almost too comfortable. The wife of my assistant, as I am now hearing, is from the Kisku *kili*, the highest-status clan here—higher than Hansda and Murmu—and by now I move through the village without hesitation and with inner confidence, approaching people—finally!

My assistant is doing his very best. I believe that by now he himself has become totally interested in kinship and marriage, and through his own pedigree I have been able to learn a great deal very concretely about kinship. Much of what can make anthropological sense I owe to his contacts and hints: collaboration with him is therefore astonishingly constructive. He follows up on my suggestions seriously, is drunk far less often than last time, and with my almost 50 pages of field diary and my system of notation I am quite satisfied; the preparatory work from the years before is paying off.

I most like to get up at five in the morning and disappear to the neighbours, because my “host mother” begins and ends the day with television—I should say, with zapping—and that gets on my nerves terribly!! She no longer goes into the jungle, has had running water installed, etc. She sleeps until late in the morning, is mostly ill (and then off she goes to the “bio-doctor” and from one injection to the next), bored, perhaps also chronically depressed—in any case, no support for me. I cannot muster any interest in her life, with which I am in close contact for many hours every day, but perhaps I urgently should?! That is why I have been helping elsewhere so far with threshing, making fires, preparing *baba*, etc. During the rice harvest I sliced my little finger with a sickle, so I am giving it my all and hopefully do not annoy people too much with my presence.

In the meantime, marriage negotiations for my grandchild have begun; I was present, and my *saki* was the chief negotiator. I am now involved in two runaway marriages, in which a go-between is also active (whose kinship relation to bride and groom is highly interesting and important); suddenly, overnight, a bride even turned up in the parental home of my assistant’s wife. I keep learning new facets of the kinship of my *saki* and her husband. The kinship network extends from Tata to Simlipal. So in fact I could hardly be any closer.

I am slowly gaining knowledge of the metaphorical, “veiled” language of these negotiations, in which, with the help of goat droppings on leaves of the sacred sal tree, people speak of two black lentils, while in fact two buffaloes are meant, etc. The bridewealth that is being negotiated and that goes to the bride’s parents and so on is called *gonong* in the Ho language, and that simply means “price” and is the same word I use at the market or in a shop to ask about the price of a commodity. This is also why I am writing: four weeks have passed, and I am struggling with the language and see no land ahead. I can speak in a halting way; perhaps I should be satisfied with that. But: I am in a Santal village, hear Santali for many hours a day, and understand virtually nothing of it.

Linguistically, I will not get any further like this. That is why I am considering what I could change and still remain in contact with my assistant. The topics I am working on are Ho-related and therefore “right,” but this way I will not achieve independence, and I would very much like to move into a family whose life I can participate in, one that is not a television life. Let us see what comes to mind.

Highly satisfied, grateful, desperate, and impatient all at once—probably the completely normal anthropological madness? I would be very happy to receive a few lines from you.

Yours,
(I venture to guess) *undin kui* or *misi kui*



3. Marriage negotiations in Kuleibira: ...actually about two buffaloes. 25.10.2009

Letter 4 – 11 November 2009: Georg Friedrich Pfeffer to Eva Reichel

Dear Ms Reichel,

I read your second “field letter” with great pleasure and admiration!

To my knowledge, no one before has ever put more than a few scraps on paper about the metaphorical language used in wedding negotiations. This is a major topic that deserves space. It will probably also be possible to identify other domains in which the full richness of the language—and of the “forms of interaction”—comes into its own.

Your everyday participation “out there” is just as wonderful. I hope you find the time to record all of this appropriately, because the details will later slip from memory. You can probably even be grateful to your TV-obsessed host mother for driving you outside. But do pay attention to healthy and regular eating and drinking, and do not overexert yourself! It will probably soon become quite painfully cold as well. After sunny days one easily underestimates the icy nights.

The inconveniences—the strain on the nerves—are part of your damn hard job. At the DGV congress in Frankfurt I heard quite a few ridiculous reports of so-called “field research” in department stores, etc., so that when reading your reports I am reminded once again of the old accolade of knighthood with Leach and company. After your return you will be “Knight Eva”. I have probably asked this many times already, but once again: Gausdal and other Santal ethnographers write of **PARIS** as the “ancestor clans” and of **KHUTS** (the *u* is pronounced nasally) as the “sacrificial clans”. Paris are Kisku, Murmu, Hansda, etc., whereas Khuts are above all **NIJ** and **SADA**; **MANJHI** and **NAEKE** are often mentioned as well. People often speak of “Manjhi-Khil” when they mean the patriline of the village headman *within the village*. This “sacrificial clan”, which is also described among the Munda, is, in my impression, that “local line” which we know

from South Orissa. It is therefore the corporate group that, within the village, is privileged—or, in alternation with similar groups, arranges the sacrifices.

You probably have not yet taken part in sacrifices, or not for any length of time, but that may well be coming your way.

As for the question of whether, how, and when you should change your domestic, TV-damaged circumstances (of all people, this had to happen to you—you should document television addiction as well), which are further aggravated by the Ho–Santal confusions, I of course cannot give a “correct” answer. But I would advise patience. In just one or two months you will know the region extremely well and will then be able to judge the alternatives.

It is good that, with your equally open and intelligent manner, you have found—and will continue to find—so many contacts, and that you are not resigning. Keep in mind that many new pieces of information, impressions, and experiences still await you. Yours will be a major work, because on the one hand you clearly have a sense for formal structures, but on the other hand you are able to appreciate the nuances and the literary quality of oral expressions. Male ethnographers, missionaries, colonial officials, etc. have never found their way into the female sphere, and the few women in the field struggled to concentrate on individual topics. No one—quite apart from language competence—has had a “vein” for modes of communication comparable to yours. Please therefore keep up your courage and attentiveness. Your husband will come in the foreseeable future to support you, and in the spring, with the many festivities, things will really take off. In other words: I am enthusiastic.

Yours,
Georg Pfeffer

(5a) 13/11/2009: Brief an Marine C. (Toulouse/ France)

*Date: **Fri, 13 Nov 2009 05:34:19 +0000***

From: eva_reichel2002@yahoo.de

Subject: RE: staying in India

To: M.C.

Letter 5a – 13 November 2009

Eva Reichel to Marine C.

Dear Marine,

as I am on my way back to the village I'll try to answer your questions briefly before I leave.

Of course, I am most interested in a paper on Santal childhood.

Whether I am interested in Ho childhood? Well, judging from my experience so far I would find it difficult to define a domain such as "childhood" with clear cut boundaries as being opposed or notionally different from, let us say adulthood. In the family where I stay e.g. my assistant's wife—after having had a run away marriage about 10 years ago and being a mother of two boys (6 and 8)—is still not FULLY married, which means that if she was to die now she could not be buried in her husband's kili's burial site, but one of her children would be eligible as he had had a full naming ceremony, the other one had not as the mother insists on his name being taken from her father's side which can't (yet) be done as his mother is not fully married. Also, as she is not fully married and as such not fully introduced to and accepted by her husband's ancestors, she is not allowed to trespass

the to me invisible line into the sacred corner of the house, where the valuables of the house are kept a.o. So when she wants to plaster the floor there, paint the walls there (as just had to be done for the festival of Sorae), get her box she will ask one of her sons. Also, the sacred diyan which needed to be prepared and kept right in this part of the house as it is the ancestors' realm, was prepared by her husband's younger brother's son (about 10 years) , who came (for this purpose??) from Tata and is staying with us since then. I am giving you these examples because to me they indicate that children are conceptionally part of an overall framework and grow into adulthood from very early onwards. I am not sure where to draw a clear line and I observe a complex intertwined whole rather than anything separate from a general social and ritual life.

No, in the village context there are no Ho writers. People discuss about Olchiti and Warangchiti, but I don't know anyone who can write it. Maybe around Chaibasa and Ranchi there are "educated" people, and at the TRTC/Chaibasa they write (and preach) Ho in Devanagari script.

Ho and government institutions: my idea is, that the logic implied in the question may work the other way round from what it suggests to me: the Hos that I have met are very self confident in their ways of being in the world . They have survived and keep being fought/missonized/civilized and modernized by the Moghuls, the British, the missionaries and the Indian government, but, as far as I can tell, they take pride in their view of the world and the teachings of their ancestors. So I would not argue that they are doing this IN ORDER TO distance etc themselves from this and that.

It was very good, I realize, to have been asked these questions because they help me to formulate some preliminary ideas of what I am about to understand in the course of my fieldwork. Please, let's keep in touch, and maybe there is something in what I have written that may be of some use for you.

I hope I have not forgotten anything important,

warm regards,

Eva

(5b) November 2009 – answer from Marine C.

Dear Eva,

Thank you for this answer from the field. I will send you my paper on children agency in press . I wanted to tell you that we should meet and comapre HO,Munda and Santal data on children and family and related themes such as ancestors clan and so on. When you are back I will be very happy to sit and discuss with you . Will you attend the conference in Bonn? I will with Cécile my PHD student who works on Saora. I will send you information on the seminar I organize in toulouse Les Savoirs de l'enfance with my colleague Dominique Blanc (working on education, oral and written etc in Southern Europe).

I met Santal writers around Jamshedpur and it seems that their literary are associated with the Sarna Dhorom movement which was also present among the Ho... Have you heard of it? Have you alsonheard of kaji the sacred

language of the deonras?

Let us keep in touch,

Warm greetings,

Marine

Letter 6 – 23 November 2009

Eva Reichel to Georg Friedrich Pfeffer

Dear Mr Pfeffer,

It is completely clear that I have in no way earned the laurels, but many thanks to you for the many important larger and smaller hints.

I immediately began to put many anthropological fragments down on paper so that they would not be lost. They simply tumbled out of my head onto the page, initiated by your letter, and the brief absence from the village did the rest. The sheer power of what is happening there really does not make it easy to find the necessary concentration. Your letter also shows me, however, how very much I am anthropologically in a valley of ignorance when it comes to the Santal, and for that reason special thanks for the hints. I notice how much the little knowledge I previously acquired about the Ho helps me in concrete fieldwork, also as a corrective to the views of my assistant.

I am now travelling back to the village and cannot respond in detail at all, but I would like to give you a few anthropological fragments as a parting gift:

For example, in marriage negotiations “four-legged animate beings” are demanded, by which a specific goat is meant, which in turn stands as a *pars pro toto* for the hosting of the bride’s village that is to be carried out by the groom’s side. And: there is talk of thorns or a thorny leaf that the groom should beware of; by this the *aji_hanyar* (the bride’s Ze) is meant, with whom an avoidance relationship will exist. There is also talk of a “burden,” a “weight,” that the *bala* side has to bear when they have “abducted” a bride. This weight, however, is not referred to directly as such, but as *porom*, which refers to the multiple casing, the “shell,” the “nest” in which red ants live high up in the crowns of the sal tree (sic!).

22 November. The last message was interrupted by a power cut, so now a few more delicacies:

Two of the highlights so far, of which I previously had no knowledge at all, are the role of the “match-makers” in marriage negotiations, both in arranged marriages and in runaway marriages. What I have found out so far—and this cost me many hours at the “desk” (which my *iril* lent me, because I am his *marang* = big *hili* = BeZ = joking relation)—is that runaway marriages are sometimes better arranged and prepared than arranged marriages, and that sometimes the boundaries become completely blurred. By now I can provide examples of both.

In the case of an arranged marriage, or rather one of the numerous steps along the way, and of an “elopement by mutual consent,” it was said that these were completely new *hora amin* (*hora*: road, the term used here for the connections between agnates and affines; *amin*: to clear the jungle and thereby claim rights to land). I simply did not want to believe this, and in four (!) attempts I found out the following:

The matchmaker is—or, caution, could in each case be—the link. In one case, the connection between bride and groom is that the groom is the ZyS of the matchmaker, and the bride is the (classificatory) ZeDD of the matchmaker. While the groom will bring a *mamun* relationship into the

marriage (the MB is the matchmaker), his wife will, after the marriage, have a *mamu* (in-law) relationship to this same person.

In a second case, the “new” road might be that the matchmaker’s daughter is married to a man from the Jerai *kili*, and through a runaway marriage the daughter of the *sango* relation of the matchmaker would now marry precisely the (classificatory) brother of his previous son-in-law.

On the untenability of anthropological boundary drawing: a man had gone through several stages of an arranged marriage and on a Friday wanted to fetch his bride along with a cow (two oxen remain with the bride’s parents, among other things) to his place. The bride’s mother, however, refused to hand over the daughter, so that the groom had to return to his village without a wife. Within hours, the matchmaker (a fit, proud old woman, about 150 years old) organized a Jeep Marshal in order to drive into the jungle already the next day with the horned groom and abduct a woman in a runaway marriage. Thus the man had a wife within a single day, albeit a different one from the one planned. The woman herself was just on her way to the market, and after some consideration she disappeared—as her mother dryly remarked—with the *rasi* (rice liquor), only that she now took it to her husband rather than selling it at the market.

Almost a film script, isn’t it? The subsequent negotiations seemed to me more carefully planned and carried out than what I had so far been able to observe in arranged marriage negotiations. Etc., etc. Finally, a joke that was told before things become serious in the negotiations: a Ho makes fun of a Briton whom he observes eating from a plate, washing it, and putting it into the cupboard. “Look how poor they are, they can afford only one plate, whereas we use our plates only once and then throw them away ...”

Tomorrow I am going back to the village. There would be much more to tell, of course, also about how I am getting into my first conflicts—which I am quite keen on, and even deliberately provoke with enjoyment; about the fact that my assistant is planning to carry out the last (?) step of his marriage when my husband visits us; the naming ceremony of his second son on the occasion of *Purnima*, the full-moon festival on 2 December, during which (as every five years) two cows are to be sacrificed on the *jayer*; which is why the *Majhi* (comparable to the Munda among the Ho) called all the men together last night for a meeting in bitter cold—perhaps this will give me access to the topic of sacrificing, and I will be able to question the *Majhi* and the *Naeke* (the village priest) about this (and about the ancestor and sacrificial clans) and hopefully accompany them...

Enclosed, before the letter becomes too long, I am sending you my reply to an email from Ms Carrin, which I hope did not come across as too brusque.

With warm greetings,

Yours,

Eva Reichel

Letter 7 – 23.11.2009, 12:07

Answer Georg Pfeffer an Eva Reichel

Dear Ms Reichel,
every report from you is a pleasure to read. Please take good care of yourself.
Best regards,
G. Pfeffer

Letter 8 – 14 December 2009

Eva Reichel an Georg Pfeffer

----- Original-Nachricht -----
Datum: Mon, 14 Dec 2009 01:36:56 -0800 (PST)
> Von: Eva Reichel <eva_reichel2002@yahoo.de>
> An: Georg Pfeffer <gpfeffer@gmx.com>
> Betreff: endlich bei den Ho angekommen!

Dear Professor Pfeffer,

please take it as a good sign that you have not heard from me for such a long time. Your doctoral child has become fledged and has embarked on independence, which makes me reasonably proud. Nevertheless, your feedback on the following matters is important to me, which is why I am sending you a few bites of recent events.

Despite all difficulties, cooperation with my assistant continues to be enjoyable and decidedly constructive—when it actually takes place. Bearing in mind what you once told me about Roland having to threaten with poisoned rice beer in order to make progress, I thought I might try something similar myself and ruthlessly—naturally within reasonable limits—threatened and implemented financial sanctions, and thus obtained what I wanted, and not a little at that. For example, with the support of my assistant and Deeney’s fantastic dictionary—which is truly incredibly helpful, because it is far more than a dictionary—I have been able, for instance, to produce the literal translation of the invocations with which, following the *Keya Ader* ceremony (the ceremony I already described in my book), the assembled people, after the death of a relative, entice the soul to come into the *adin*: promises are made to it, it is bribed, threatened, intimidated, tenderly coaxed and viciously shouted at—exactly the way people here deal with their cows. The analogies that I am now able to substantiate linguistically are lurking everywhere, and I have been able to record all of this with my technically fine little voice recorder and now have it available in Ho and in English—just imagine that! In addition, I have recorded the lament of a woman in Ho (and now also in English), in which she loudly sings her suffering after the death of her husband. As a third jewel, I have the negotiations conducted on the occasion of a run-away marriage between the *Majhi* and the representatives of the groom’s and the bride’s sides, in which standardized formulations are used to examine the necessary clarifications for a socially acceptable union—contrary to what I had expected, these negotiations, though linguistically fixed, are decidedly amusing and humorous, full of metaphors that are nevertheless understood by everyone (for example, the groom is asked: *have you broken*

your diring—that is, the horns of the wild bison—and the bride: *have you crossed an ari*—these are the embankments separating the rice fields; is it clear what is meant?).

I have now experienced my first sacrificial night (from 24:00 until 10:00 the next morning), which was conducted by the Santal *diuri*, the *naeke*, and in the darkness of the night I was able to clarify important questions together with him and his father, the predecessor of the *naeke*, the shaman, our neighbor, and several others (in general, many things are negotiated and clarified collectively here—really a feast for postmodernism; little seems to be absolutely fixed, and collective memory has to be refreshed again and again), for example whether the gods—and which ones—were present at the sacrifice, how this could be recognized, and when they would disappear again—here, too, there are many analogies. Of the 80 male household heads, more than fifty were present throughout the entire night. These are now a few fragments; of course, there is much more to be added to each of them.

The reason why I am asking for your feedback is the following: I have separated myself residentially, though not in terms of work, from my assistant and am now living in what one would call a *hamlet* in English, inhabited and spoken exclusively by Ho. They all belong to the *kili* Kondankel, which is regarded here as *Kunt Katti* and enjoys high prestige. It was a small tactical masterpiece on my part: the place is about half an hour on foot from my assistant / ten minutes by bicycle, about fifteen minutes from my *sakin*, under whose jurisdiction it falls, and five minutes from the village whose burial ceremony I discussed in my book. I have found a family whose woman, my *kaki*, takes touching care of me, exactly as I had dreamed of: we get up at five o'clock, her husband, my *kaka*, disappears to the fields for the rice harvest, and I spend the entire day with her (and the cows, goats, sheep, and many children) working—finally learning Ho: fetching water, sweeping, cooking, harvesting rice, carrying bundles of rice on my head, making *diyan* (rice beer), etc.



At first, I chose this solution because of language acquisition, but I feared that it might be unsuitable for fieldwork, as there are only about twelve to fifteen households in a

confined space. In the meantime, however, I am realizing that the boundary around this *sai* is rather fictitious, because in the rice fields I suddenly find myself working together with the woman from the cover of my book, from whom my *kaki* had received black lentils and for whom she now helps for a day during the rice harvest. She puts me to work mightily and I toil properly, but that suits me just fine. It is a village without electricity, it is spotlessly clean, the food is excellent, and in the evenings we sit together and talk. Here are the largest burial stones I have seen so far, of course under tall tamarind trees—it would certainly please you, and you are welcome to envy me.



Nobody can speak English, and my assistant is far away. There are many visitors, and in passing I learn from their daughter that she has married the son of her *mamun*. Everyone is introduced to me using kinship terms, until my head is spinning: I now believe I can substantiate that *sango* is used here as a generic term for a joking relationship, since in one case it appears to me quite clearly to be a cross-cousin marriage. I am writing this because I can now imagine that I may be able to find out quite a lot here—and, as a woman, I can immerse myself completely in the women’s world. Given the fact that after the week I have now spent here I have hardly left “my” house, I may need the remaining three months in order to investigate my small, manageable Ho environment more thoroughly (and perhaps to discover that it is not so limited and manageable after all—and purely Ho is probably also a fiction, because in the rice fields I suddenly find myself together again with my former Santal neighbours...).

In the meantime, I have received offers from both Ranchi and Chaibasa, each including an assistant, and I should probably decide very soon and finally stop being in one place while imagining myself in another.

That is all for today. I send you my warm regards,

**Yours,
Eva Reichel**

Letter 9 – 15 December 2009, 10:35

Georg Pfeffer an Eva Reichel

Dear Ms Reichel,

your report is, as always, sensational. My suspicion was therefore correct: you have the ideal attitude towards ethnography. Please do remain in the small Ho hamlet of the *kili* Kondankel and continue to intensify your contacts there. There will be enough “outside world” even in that place, and later on many other solutions will be conceivable, but at this stage it is absolutely crucial that you put down truly deep roots among the women and within their context. The learning effect will be enormous and will help you greatly later on in very different settings.

I always very much enjoy archiving your letters for posterity in your folder, because your major successes can thus be traced so well step by step. The variability of empirical events, the “negotiating” by the actors involved, all these differences between analytical levels have, incidentally, “always” existed. Neither Hardenberg nor I ever experienced a buffalo sacrifice among the Kond with an identical sequence and emphasis, and certainly every cockfight in Bali was different from the others as well. It is from this tension between empirical reality and the structure of ideas that ethnological work emerges—work that can only succeed if the ethnographic task is carried out as carefully as you have done so far. I am also slowly beginning to suspect that by Easter your command of Ho will be outstanding. I can also assure you that even “already now” you have grasped far more, and far more clearly and deeply, than all previous works on these people.

As far as dealing with your assistant is concerned, you are mastering this difficult chapter as well. You have to work WITH him, and therefore you must not apply the usual sanctions of the German labour market (distancing up to dismissal), but you also have to WORK with him, and therefore he must not be allowed to take every liberty. With your characteristic great friendliness you can very well make his deficiencies clear to him by means of deductions. If he performs less, you should also do less for him. Your independence in the hamlet is certainly the hardest blow to his impertinences. On the other hand, under these circumstances no better assistant is likely to be found. You have the advantage of knowing his weaknesses.

Please take very good care of your health!

That sense of elation which seizes me when reading your reports seems to have something to do with a “harvest”, following a period of sowing—my own first efforts almost thirty years ago, when, as a “lonely wolf”, I set out for the Wild West. *Det Jefeühl* will endure.

With warm regards,

Yours,
Georg Pfeffer

P.S. I have now reviewed Lea Schulte's work—which contains a great deal of Santal material; Peter Berger (with his family) is about to set off for Koraput.

Letter 10 – 11 January 2010

Eva Reichel to Georg Pfeffer

Subject: Halfway through!

Dear Professor Pfeffer,

this will most certainly be a completely unspectacular, unsensational, modest and short email. Yes, it is halfway through, and I have the feeling that I am only just beginning. I still know so little beyond superficialities; much needs to be deepened, asked again, understood more thoroughly, and time is becoming short. My language skills are improving, but they are still very limited and halting and will probably remain so. The language is beautiful and enticing, but it is devilishly difficult. Peter told me that Arlo G. used to kneel down in front of people, look up into their mouths from below in order to grasp the exact positioning of the tongue, and then, within four weeks, was able to speak Gutob (or Gotub?)—which is also a Mundari language. That makes me green with envy and admiration. Still, things are moving forward, and I am happy about the independent encounters with people here, the short conversations, which are becoming ever more matter-of-fact and give me the feeling that, in my own way and at my own pace, at the right time and in the right place, I am doing the right thing.



The recent period has been somewhat fragmented: my husband was here for two weeks, was able to make himself useful threshing rice, and can now fully appreciate my enthusiasm for my *sai* and its people, which is very reassuring for me. We were briefly in Puri, and I have just returned from Sambalpur, where I attended a workshop with Deepak, Peter and Uwe. It was nice to see and speak with everyone, but in the urban

comfort zone I also felt alien, and I made decisions there which may be of interest to you: I now want to immerse myself properly—that is, without major interruptions—in my village and its external and internal relationships. I have therefore abandoned the search for another place (and another assistant), will no longer travel around, and have also cancelled a lecture in Chaibasa and a visit to Ranchi, which would once again have torn me out of my local context for several days. Perhaps three consecutive months in one place will bring the necessary continuity and, after all, yield some results—it seems to me at least a reasonable consideration. As I said, somewhat matter-of-fact this time, but nevertheless determined.

With warm regards,

Yours,
Eva Reichel

Letter 11 – 12 January 2010, 12:19

Georg Pfeffer an Eva Reichel

Dear Ms Reichel,

evidently you are healthy and in good spirits; that, first of all, cannot be overestimated. Your focus is the right one.

I have just read in Colin Turnbull's *The Forest People* that he “dismissed” his assistant (always the same one) every week. His Mbuti are organised so simply that one begins to long for people like the Ho.

Keep it up, and my very best wishes for 2010.

Yours sincerely,
Georg Pfeffer

Letter 12 – 26 January 2010

Eva Reichel to Georg Pfeffer

Subject: 5th Field Report

Dear Professor Pfeffer,

many thanks for your last reply, which I have only now been able to read. The feedback from you is supportive and important to me, and it sustains me especially in situations in which I ask myself whether, for all my commitment, I possess the necessary aptitude for this undertaking and its challenges—physically and anthropologically.

Whereas at first I shared my new accommodation with a brooding hen in the *adin*, which wanted and needed to leave the room at night, I now share the space with small

mice who have no intention whatsoever of leaving voluntarily. My accommodation is thus public in every respect, and I am extremely glad that I decided to bring as little technology with me as possible.

In the evenings it suddenly becomes bitterly cold and remains so until early morning. For breakfast there may even be field rat, *esu sibi:l*, which is described as very delicate—a predicate otherwise reserved for the sacred rice beer.

The choice of “my” *sai* seems to have been the right one. My host family leads an active working life with numerous outward connections, so that “the world” is a guest in our house (a great deal of *diyan* / rice beer is drunk, and my *kaki* may occasionally collapse horizontally, but is fit again the next morning), and I myself am variously occupied outside. Whereas at first I thought my *sai* might be too small for fieldwork, I now rather fear that I may not even be able to cope with this.

I am astonished at how the contacts I have built up here since 2006 come together in my work, and at how my host family—my *kaka* and my *kaki*, together with constantly changing additional children who stay overnight for long periods and then disappear again—are firmly embedded in this network, without my having previously been aware of it. To pursue this network will take some time, but I find it exciting and worthwhile, because the *miyad chaturenko*, about which I have already written quite a bit in my book, here provides precisely the information that is always supplied spontaneously when I ask about connections. It thus seems to be a classification below the level of the *kili*, which, as a lived category, is present and draws boundaries. (As for the connection with marriage norms and practices, however, I am not yet able to say anything definite, since there is also talk of sister exchange across three generations between two *kilis* in two villages.)



I now have as my immediate neighbour a roughly seventy-year-old, humorous, talkative old man with an elephant’s memory, who likes to speak about his *miyad chaturenko*, to which my host family belongs, as do he himself and others from the neighbouring

village whom I have known for a long time. *The tapestry of kinship* thus becomes ever more concrete, and I find myself right in the middle of it.

I will briefly indicate what else has happened and what I would like to pursue further:

1. A woman in the neighbouring village has been burned. There is talk of suicide or murder. She is buried outside the ancestral line, not anointed with oil, not rubbed with turmeric. The usual death rituals do not take place; the soul is not invited to dwell in the *adin*. It is being considered whether she should be cremated so that the police will not be able to conduct investigations. An affine, the deceased woman's son-in-law, performs a purification ritual. After the men present leave the place and wait at the burial site, the women (which ones?) examine the body (the corpse is thoroughly inspected with its wounds—I see stab wounds; there is thus secret knowledge among the women here) and prepare the deceased with oil, turmeric, money, especially many new sarees, and particularly intense lamentation.

2. *Mage Porob*, the great festival after the end of the rice harvest, must be fixed by the village priest, or *diuri*. He has, however, resigned, and a new one must be elected—proposed by the villagers in a meeting on the *akhara* and confirmed by the gods. Convening the meeting and performing the ritual are time-consuming. In a *bonga* ritual the gods show their approval or rejection. Two bamboo poles about three metres long, held by two boys of about eight years of age, come together and “knot” in the case of approval—which they indeed did.

I catch myself not being particularly astonished. Perhaps I need to be careful to preserve the necessary distance and not to slip unreflectively into new self-evidences. *Mage Porob* will now take place in mid-February—at new moon rather than at full moon. The norm of full moon remains valid, but in practice deviations are negotiable and can be implemented with divine sanction.



3. Alongside the highest god *Sinbonga*, the protecting gods of the mountains are invoked in rituals—in a range from Simlipal via Manbir to Nilgiri—and I ask myself whether there is an analogy to the region from which marriage partners are taken (for Nilgiri I do not yet have any evidence).

Again and again I become aware of the sense and necessity of long-term fieldwork. For example, at first I was very tempted to interpret the refusal of my first “host mother” to allow me to participate in women’s work in and outside the house as her personal incapacity and unwillingness—especially since in my current accommodation I am drawn into all tasks and am even told how to take the pan off the stove. In the meantime, however, I have come to the conclusion that the different behaviour is grounded in the behavioural codes embedded in the kinship system: in the first case it was a *ma–kimin* relationship, and my *kimin* had explicitly explained to me that, as a mother, she was not allowed to give me work assignments, although she did expect them from me. She even imitated the voice in which she expected these assignments from me. My gentle voice suited her as my *kimin* and not me as her mother. I simply did not understand this. Now, as *mai* (young girl) for my *kaki* (FByW), I simply have to carry out all tasks, and as long as I do not perform them absolutely correctly, they are explained to me in detail, whether I want it or not. This only became clear to me when it once became too much for me and I wanted to say: I am not a little girl! That is precisely what I am in this family, and my *kaki* is merely behaving within the expected behavioural standards.

For this reason, too, it was good to change families, and only through the change was I able to recognise this connection. It has also become clear to me that a man in the same house in the same village would have entirely different experiences, because I see very little of my *kaka*, as his world is essentially “outside”.

I realise that I find it difficult to render the abundance and richness of what I encounter in a linguistically vivid way, and therefore I will stop here.

Dear Professor Pfeffer,
I send you my warm regards as always and wish you a healthy, good, and very gratifying year 2010.

Yours,
Eva Reichel

P.S. I have just learned that J. Deeney died on 18 January. I had taken leave of him in Tata exactly one week earlier. He was very ready to die, was mentally clear right to the end, and took leave of me with the words: “give me a hug”.

Letter 13 – 26 January 2010, 09:51

Reply from Georg Pfeffer to Eva Reichel

Dear Ms Reichel,

as always, your letter is fascinating. This will be a major piece of work. McDougal, among others, has written about the reciprocal expectations of relatives, but apparently only by “asking” about them, whereas through your immediate experiences—as a “mother” or “daughter”—you have had these relational valuations imposed upon you in direct comparison.

Naturally, the experience of a “bad death” is also a particular gift for the ethnographer. You observe the details—for instance of the body—and thereby obtain ethnographic information of unsurpassable intensity.

When you refer to the *diuri* as a “village priest”, I have some reservations. In the south there is always a calendar specialist and astrologer (*dissari*) who determines the dates of the festivals, and alongside him a permanent “priest” who carries out the everyday rituals. Among the Munda and Kharia the latter is the *pahan*. Is there no such designation among the Ho?

My seminar is about to begin, so let me wish you that you do not underestimate THE COLD. Here it is minus 17 degrees. In addition, the government has just drastically cut subsidies for solar energy and, thanks to the FDP, has relieved the distressed sectors of hoteliers, pharmacists, and tax advisers—and, of course, wealthy heirs. WE ARE ADVANCED.

Please stay healthy,

Yours,
G. Pfeffer

Letter 14 – 16 February 2010

Eva Reichel to friends (...)

(not via Pfeffer)

Hello, my dears,

today I would like to write you a brief personal letter, one that is not governed by a certain professional distance, as it is not primarily addressed to my professor.

Even though I only have sporadic access to the internet, I would like to tell you how much I always rejoice when I find longer or shorter messages from you, even if I am not always able to reply to them personally.

I am just about to set off again for my village, which is currently being cleaned for the great spring festival—cleaned both in terms of tidiness and ritually. Here, people not only take a bath in the great lake, but they also wash, venerate, dance around, and bathe



their gods just as much. Thus, last week I experienced, quite unexpectedly, a day on which the women of a particular caste (those responsible for herding the cows, who have lived together with my Ho for millennia) collectively fell into trance, became possessed and began to dance around. Boys aged five to eight, who enjoy a ritually high status, lie down on the ground, and women step over them. The whole thing is so damn down to earth and real—people spit in between, chew tobacco, chat, urinate, laugh—that I find myself thinking: how will I ever be able to understand this and explain it to others? In any case, it has absolutely nothing of anything mystically muddled or esoteric about it—and what impresses me immensely is that children are an integral part of everything here, as a matter of course, as part of a village community in which, like the adults, the ancestors, and the gods, they have their fixed place, their standing, their responsibilities, and their freedoms.



I myself clearly notice that my stay is coming to an end. I dream of marriage relations, rituals, liver-sausage sandwiches, and a trouser suit in ready-to-wear size 32. Even though it is unclear to me what I will do with my “data” and whether I have “collected” enough, I believe that I simply need a break and am looking forward to being at home again—to seeing you and to working in the garden.

With warm greetings,

**Yours,
Eva**

Letter 15 – 10 March 2010

Eva Reichel to Georg Pfeffer

Dear Professor Pfeffer,

before my return in three weeks’ time, a few notes on the current state of affairs. I still believe that I am doing what lies within my means, but whether what I observe, find, learn, experience, and record in this short period of time will suffice for a substantial subsequent interpretation and presentation that does serious justice to this complex, vital culture and its people—that remains an open question. Even though I am making progress linguistically, I am very aware of how I reach my limits when it comes to more in-depth questioning.

For while I was thinking about how I might still steer the collaboration with my assistant into more intensive and (in my understanding) more reliable channels, he stopped working with me altogether. I needed some time to take this in, because he kept making new appointments with me and then repeatedly did not turn up. By now, however, I can see this in a positive light: first, I am no longer dependent, I can plan and structure my days independently and have become more flexible thanks to the elimination of those nerve-racking waiting times; second, I was forced to take the initiative, which at last feels like independent, independent fieldwork, beyond the filtered guidance provided by the assistant.

My *kaki* has turned out to be an excellent informant. In the mornings, when the women of the village gather by the fire and while fetching water, exchanging news, whispering, giggling, and gossiping about what will come up during the day, I am initiated and informed—and, after a glance at the sky, also sent off on my way in good time when she herself cannot come along. In this way—without an assistant—I learn, through repeated participant observation of the same rituals in different villages/*sais*, things that are similar, surprising, and different.

Surprising, for instance: the Gau/cowherders celebrated their *Sib Jateri* for one day and one night. I had been expecting a Hindu festival and was even somewhat reluctant to take part, until I discovered the Ho *diuri*, who together with the Gau *diuri* were in

charge of the choreography of the festival and accompanied it. Two days earlier I had noticed the Gau priest at the *munda* of the Ho, in whose courtyard he carried out a *bonga* in preparation for, and in connection with, the great *Mage* festival. The symbiosis that until then had been an abstract thesis for me suddenly came alive, and I became quite excited: at the end of the long day I was then introduced to a woman of the Gau caste as the *sapakin* of my *kaki*. Relationship terms thus apply not only between Santal and Ho, but also, for example, between Ho and members of caste groups.

At present I am in Chaibasa and have had a series of highly interesting conversations with D. S. Purty, Denney's assistant, in order to discuss with him, as a Ho (in English), what was important to me and to clarify various matters that had remained unclear or unresolved with my assistant. Some things that the latter, himself a Santal, had presented to me as a pure Ho affair—and which I had not been able to find in Denney's dictionary—have indeed turned out not to be Ho at all.

As always, there is still a great deal to write. The worry of not bringing back enough is considerable—please do not expect too much! The choice of village was the right one, however; my *kaki/kaka* are wonderful people, they challenge and support me. I have successfully passed the examination as *mai*. It seems to me that my actual fieldwork really began only with my move to this village.

Power cut! Off with this mail quickly!

Yours,
Eva Reichel

Brief 16 – 10 March 2010, 21:41

Reply from Georg Pfeffer to Eva Reichel

Dear Ms Reichel,

your work is excellent and better than what I otherwise know from the North. Your concerns are also the usual ones.

I have also encountered Gau in Koraput who have lived there “since time immemorial” and are organized according to the same clans as the ST. Of course they say that they are “Hindus”, but “Hinduism” is not an Abrahamic religion with clearly defined boundaries of membership. The connections with the Ho are particularly interesting precisely because people like us are always inclined to separate one from the other.

I am looking forward to seeing you again. Unfortunately, a sense of inadequacy is part of our profession—but only among those who are truly demanding.

Best,
Georg Pfeffer

Brief 17 – 26 March 2010

Anne Behr to Eva Reichel

Dear Eva,

I just wanted to wish you a good journey home and at the same time hope that not too many tears will be shed—or perhaps they should be, after all, since they are part of it too and do a good job of soothing wounds of the soul.

We are really looking forward to seeing you again in May and are hoping for lots of beautiful photos, with comments to go with them. I was especially intrigued by your re-experiencing of their trance state.

Both of you, be warmly greeted from both of us—and I wish us all a wonderful rustling of spring.

Yours,
Anne

Brief 18 – 1 April 2010

Eva to Anne Behr

Tatanagar

You judged that very well—yes, the farewell from the village is indeed behind me (OF COURSE once again quite different from what I had expected: several colleagues had warned me that, in some cases, the people to whom they had meanwhile become closely attached confronted them at the very last moment with outrageous financial demands and had already fictitiously divided up their possessions among themselves.

So while I was wondering when and whether something similar might be awaiting me, my “parents” got up at four in the morning—something they normally only do in order, immediately after the first cockcrow (which here is called “the roosters’ weeping”), to prepare the husked rice with rice straw for the sacred rice beer—and I asked myself what the occasion might be today and which festival was being prepared that, once again, I knew nothing about.

Well, and while a certain sceptical caution with regard to the coming hours refused to leave me, my “father” slaughtered a chicken (which I did not notice), prepared it (which I did not notice), my “mother” prepared fresh rice (which I did not notice), because I—still typically Eva or typically individualistic or typically Western or ??—was revolving only around ME and Myself: brushing my teeth, packing my suitcase, circling in my thoughts, at least sweeping my room, etc.

And when I wanted to take my leave in a proper manner at 5:45 a.m., as announced, I was invited to a wonderful cooked breakfast and was hospitably treated according to all

the rules of Ho tradition. While I was eating, quite speechless and also ashamed, a bag was packed for me with their own rice and other rare delicacies for my family in Berlin.

And so, right up to the very last day, I could not stop marvelling at the Ho, at their immense generosity—and at my own blinkered way of thinking...

See you soon, dear Anne. I am very happy that it is becoming ever more natural for you to speak not only of yourself, but of *you* as a couple—that is something I do want to note!

Yours,
Eva

Letter 19 – 1 April 2010, 21:57

Last letter to G. Pfeffer from India

Dear Professor Pfeffer,

yes, I too am looking forward to seeing you again—perhaps after a short period of re-settling and being with my family, say from Sunday, 11 April?—and, more generally, to my return.

Just as the timing of my arrival in October had been exactly right, I now experience a kind of mental overload, accompanied by considerable physical exhaustion, so that the date of my return also seems to have been chosen wisely.

One open question remains for me so far: what, in the Geertzian sense, must I have understood in order to be able to say that I have understood anything at all? Is there something like a minimum set of requirements? *You don't have to be one to KNOW one*—well roared, lion; an almost arrogant claim, isn't it?

Somehow, the two weeks during which supposedly less—or nothing at all—was meant to happen never materialized, and I ask myself when I might have had the opportunity to read *Joseph and His Brothers* by Thomas Mann, which L. Werth had recommended for hours of leisure. This may also be related to my everyday fieldwork with the women, because Ho women may be small and delicate, but they are remarkably strong, resilient, and capable of sustained physical labour. Right up to the very end, for example, I was unable to carry even remotely the quantities of water they routinely manage. I gradually relinquished that claim, but I am now able to carry water on my head without spilling a single drop (it resembles a yoga headstand, only inverted—you have to hit the crown precisely), can reliably make fire, chop wood, prepare earth for the courtyard, *pindigi*, and the house (all of these being activities during which productive reflections arise—though how one is to take anthropological notes with both hands in mud or cow dung remains an open question, especially when new thoughts replace the old ones half an hour later), etc.

Nevertheless, the decision to share everyday life with women proved sound, if only because otherwise I would have been constantly searching—unsuccessfully—for

access, given that men's and women's worlds here are separated for long stretches, to the point that women are excluded from certain rituals. This was entirely new to me among the Ho. So when I wished to attend a ritual that I had already observed twice with my husband, I experienced exclusion where I had previously been merely (dis)approvingly tolerated. This clarified what had previously remained unclear: among other things, a **male** goat had to be procured by a **male** assistant of the **male diuri**, sacrificed by him at the *dessauli*, distributed and prepared by specific **men**, and finally consumed only by certain **men**—all under the exclusion of women, including among the onlookers.



*Ba' Porob in Pathan Sai. 01.03.2010. The ritual sacrifice at the sacred village site, the *desauli*, is an entirely male affair ...*

Within my family, too, certain matters of the day were briefly discussed in the mornings, after which everyone went about their duties—regardless of whether they had been ill or heavily intoxicated the day before, which occurred not infrequently. Whereas in our „Western“ individualized world, intoxicated individuals often remain centred on their individual selves and how to acquire the next bottle (am I generalizing too much?), devoid of any social contacts, the thoughts of my *kaki*—whether in a sober or intoxicated state—continued to revolve around her social obligations: the preparation of the next *diri dulsunum*, what was still missing, who would cook the curry, who would hang the laundry, who would look for the animals (no longer herded after *Ba-Porob*), who would fetch water, and so forth. Beyond neurobiological determinism, Durkheim cannot be ignored; alcoholism here and alcoholism there is simply not the same.

My vocabulary relating to *arki* (Deeney: “highly intoxicating drinks”) has meanwhile expanded considerably, since intoxicated persons themselves clearly register their respective states and can name them publicly, with confidence and even pleasure—without embarrassment or evasiveness. Two terms given to me in Ho by my intoxicated *kaki* and her sober daughter correspond to what I last encountered in Shakespeare as two

of the seven deadly sins: gluttony and covetousness—and, remarkably, Deeney indeed has it all in his dictionary!

Towards the end I repeatedly suffered from gastrointestinal problems and the familiar yet thoroughly unpleasant cycle of illness, each time severely weakening me. In addition, people in my immediate surroundings fell ill with malaria and died—children and elderly people alike—and in Chaibasa I did not encounter a single person who did not have malaria. Alongside prophylaxis, I am convinced that good physical condition is the most effective preventive measure. Given the extreme heat (42 degrees, and this is only the beginning of summer), I am now glad to be leaving in order to regain strength, as I am uncertain how much longer I would have endured the climate—an uncertainty that had, after all, informed the original scheduling. I remain full of admiration for people like Berit, who continued to work despite being repeatedly and seriously ill.

All in all, I have now spent over a year with my Ho, spread across four years. We shall see what I make of it. I felt well prepared and supported by you. Paying attention to my health, exercising caution, and recognizing the work as a demanding and strenuous undertaking—these became important guidelines and provided orientation and calm in difficult moments.

I am currently in Tata, dealing with matters relating to a possible edition of Deeney's texts after his death, and am encountering considerable interest. Tomorrow I will leave for Howrah, and on Sunday I hope to be back in Berlin in time for breakfast.

Best wishes,
Yours,
Eva Reichel

Letter 20 – 5 April 2010, 12:24

Reply from Georg Pfeffer

Dear Ms Reichel,

I have only just returned when my grandchildren rang the doorbell downstairs. Therefore only very briefly:

your fieldwork is sensational and fundamentally different from that of many others (including yours truly). So do not worry—write when you have regained your strength.

With your letter, the Easter message has been fulfilled:
EX ORIENTE LUX.

Yours,
G. Pfeffer

Letter 21 – 11 April 2010, 10:48

Second reply from Georg Pfeffer

Dear Ms Reichel,

your wonderful letter (No. 19, E.R.) strengthens my hope that today you will arrive back in Berlin in reasonably good health, so that you can recover **VERY THOROUGHLY**. That has absolute priority.

As I will be travelling to Spain for an extended period from 21 April, it might be good for us to speak beforehand. Please suggest a time. I am available at any time except Sunday, when my grandson will be celebrating his First Communion.

Substantively, your reports constantly stimulate my thinking: alcoholism, for example, is a central topic and yet is either not addressed at all or treated inadequately.

I already have a few ideas regarding your future, but these can only be discussed after thorough examinations at the Tropical Institute. Roland Hardenberg is delighted about your return and hopes to persuade you to give a lecture in Tübingen. He only just managed to leave Kyrgyzstan before the unrest began.

For now, however, regeneration alone should prevail, together with enjoyment of the young green and the gentle spring in the company of familiar people.

Welcome back!

Yours,
G. Pfeffer

Letter 22 – 11 April 2010, 12:05

First letter from Berlin after return

Eva Reichel to Georg Pfeffer

Dear Professor Pfeffer,

Rather impolitely I failed to reply to your first welcome greeting of 5 April, instead throwing myself straightaway into spring, my garden, and my bed. My husband, daughters, and grandchildren had travelled to Berlin and welcomed me, ate with me, and stayed overnight. It was a truly good reception, even though the principle of seniority is culturally foreign to my grandchildren.

The first week back in Berlin is now behind me; I have found my way back into the new rhythm and into my culture of origin with surprising ease—though I have avoided the local temples in which consumption is worshipped—and I am now well rested. After having produced only four batteries for my camera as waste in my village over the

course of half a year (which I will recycle here), I can scarcely comprehend the quantities of packaging waste that accumulate here within just a few days, even in an ecologically conscious household: **we are so advanced!**

Thank you for your second letter today and for your great interest. Yes, I would be very happy to come and see you from tomorrow onwards and to turn my attention back to work. I propose coming by tomorrow at 4 p.m., or on Tuesday at 10 a.m., or on Wednesday at 2 p.m. Please let me know which day suits you best, or feel free to suggest another time.

With warm regards,

Yours sincerely,
Eva Reichel



Gara Sai, 5.02.2010. These boys are the protagonists at the Gau O'l festival held in the courtyard of S's house. The ritual is choreographed by the diuri or ritual guide of the Gau community.

Correspondence: Fieldwork in Middle India 2009/2010

Eva Reichel, Free University Berlin – 17.06.2010