

Introduction

When I enrolled for this summer school I was primarily interested in meeting interesting people who are in an academic situation similar to mine and who would have to say interesting things on interesting topics - rather than in the topic as such. For a change from writing up my doctoral thesis on the Ho, a tribal community in Central Eastern India, I was looking forward to being offered new reading material and to listening to others unfolding and 'presenting their research in detail'. I had never attended a summer school before in my life, and things seemed relaxed, when rather unexpectedly I was kindly informed that I am one of those (others) to come up with a presentation, and please, make sure, no more than 20 minutes sharp! I have to confess that only then did I read the topic really carefully. I have also to confess that I had been privileged to develop my research topic in the field, and transformation of religion and culture has not been my focus for the reason that the Ho in their ritual performances seem to resist change and innovation and prefer to stick to how things were done as they have been done since time immemorial, in fact since the creation of the Ho universe, which is co-terminous with the beginning of the world. However, as there will be processes of transformation in societies with a non-documented history if in what Sahlins in 'Islands of History' calls 'conjunctural' ways, I will have to consider this strand. Maybe I will find some enlightenment in the days to come.

So, for the 17 minutes that are left for my presentation now, I have decided to present instead 'contemporary voices from the Muslim periphery' in the tribally dominated hills and plateaux of the Indian states Jharkhand and Odisha. That way I will have covered at least 50% of this course's topic.

In the course of my fieldwork the Muslim community for a number of reasons that I will explain in a minute had been so peripheral in my anthropological awareness that only last year - after having been in the area for some 6 years and after having completed fieldwork - or so I thought - I successfully attempted to get in touch with at least some of its members. What I read out to you now is a result of this minimal fieldwork. It is part of a chapter in my thesis on the Ho who in that region are the tribal cultivators, landowners, patrons and their clients, the servicing castes and categories of whom the Muslims as traders and tailors are one.

I look forward to listening to your feedback afterwards.

Introduction (from the 3rd chapter of my thesis on “The Ho and their clients”)

Sheik Imran and Sheik Abdul, the present secular head (*sardar*) of the Muslim Community of Pathan Sai and his predecessor had agreed to meet for a talk, which was followed by another one two weeks later. As usual in such situations among the Ho a larger crowd, perhaps 15 to 25 people, immediately gathered, in the Muslim case all male, listening intensively, participating actively, negotiating meaning, staying on or leaving. Others joined, young and old, children sometimes kept at a distance or hushed down by their elders - trained into the principle of seniority the Muslim way. This chapter is based mainly on information gained in these two basically non - structured interviews in December 2012. As such the data collected are few and not won in the course of participant observation. The situation was rather one of veranda ethnography, although it was a veranda in front of the village store which was run by Sheik Abdul, and not that of the anthropologist. The ethnographic description is necessarily thin, which shows especially in the paragraph on marriage, however interesting enough to have been included here. The reasons why direct communication with the Muslim community was established at a time when the main fieldwork was assumed to have been completed may reflect aspects of the particular kind of conviviality between Ho, Santal and the Muslim category of their clients.

One of the reasons is the very lack of communication and of ritual interaction between the tribal categories and their Muslim clients which is significantly different from interactional patterns between the Ho and the *Gau*, for example, the Ho's herders. Three examples are given to illustrate the point of conceptual distinction.

Example One: Muslim tailors live opposite my *saki's* house in Pathan Sai, maybe not more than five metres away on the other side of the mud road dividing the Ho and the Muslim community spatially and ritually. Whoever opened their front doors could not avoid perceiving the other or being perceived by them. Whenever I was visiting my *saki* I used to step over to the Muslim tailors, all of them males, who were busy working at their Singer sewing machines outside their houses in the courtyards. We would converse in Ho, and they did not mind my

coming over to them and asking questions. However, I never observed my *saki* paying them a visit or talking to them informally. When too many Muslim children were curiously watching the scene through the open entrance door of my *saki's*, this door would often be closed to their faces. My *saki* who was generally keenly interested in introducing me into the Ho universe, obviously did not consider social interaction with the Muslim community part of this. She did not object to my going there, but she never commented on it. It was as if they were mentally and conceptually non-existent. As the wife of the *munda* of Pathan Sai she was surely aware of the boundaries that were to be respected in this multi-ethnic convivium within which the Ho and their various client categories cooperated in interdependent, interrelated, yet clearly separate ways. In a process of identifying with Ho views and attitudes and without my being aware of this process I, too, had begun to exclude them from my perception and my focus of research.

Example Two: As regards the absence of verbal interaction I had made a similar observation with my *kaki* from Boja Sai (see chapter "Portraits"). Whenever people were meeting, seeing, or bypassing each other usually the latest news and other bits of meaningful information would be exchanged often without anybody halting or turning back. There is no gender differentiation in that Ho women will readily address or respond to others, men or female alike. If, however, it happened that someone was passed silently an unresolved conflict or some kind of social punishment was often the reason behind it¹. The silence in passing was always meaningful. The case with the Muslims, however, was different in that the pattern of non-perception between spatially close neighbours was extended indiscriminately to the category as such. "We never talk to them, because they don't talk to us." This was all my *kaki* was prepared to explain, and she could be a very wordy person indeed.

Example Three: My Santal assistant who had lived in the area for more than forty years, claims to have never been on social terms with any Muslim of Pathan Sai in his life and to have never entered a Muslim house, although he knew that I knew that he regularly went there to order and buy beef. Was this classified as a

¹ From an epistemological point of view this is important to know, because useful information was to be gained not only by listening to what was being said and not only by observing what was being done, but by becoming aware of what was not being said and not being done. At the same time it became obvious that these public non-reactions were socio-culturally controlled and not the result of some spontaneous intrapersonal emotion such as anger or resentment, of indifference or mere coincidence.

pure economic transaction and as such accepted behaviour - though not for his wife who never went? When he once received a written invitation to a Muslim wedding, it was clear for him not to consider going there: "They invite us, because they know we don't come. We don't go, because they kill cows, and they wouldn't come to us, because they know that we eat pork." He was quite adverse to the project of getting in touch with the Muslims for fieldwork purposes. "Oh no, that is not possible", he said. "You cannot do that". Only when I threatened to go without him, he was prepared to accompany me and even took pride in initiating the talks by getting in touch with the Muslim *Sardar* of Pathan Sai. The atmosphere of the meetings was rather pleasant and an unexpected invitation for lunch at the *Sardar's* house two days later was extended and verbally accepted. The invitation was even handed around as a kind of symbolic capital, but he did not go: "We can't. They don't really mean it". So a socially competent person's behaviour reflected and expressed the strength of the principled conceptual distance and distinction between the category patron and the category client.

1.2 History and the category Sheik of Muslim Sai

The Muslims of Pathan Sai do not live in a separate hamlet as the *kunkal* (potter community) do in the neighbouring village of Manbir. Their houses have been built close to each other in a compact area of Pathan Sai and, though spatially separate from the Ho, visibly a constituent part of it with a mosque in its centre. They have separate wells, their own *banda* (tank, pond), and their separate school attached to the mosque.

My informants claim to have been in the area very long, for at least five generations. They arrived, they say without having been asked, as the Ho needed them. They recognize the Ho as the first settlers in the area and mention the Sinku and Kondangkel *kili* in this context². To their conviction the Ho first called the *Gau* (members of the Gaur or Gope caste, cow - herds; see below). Before they were invited as tailors, they say, the *Pano* had settled in the area as weavers. They refer to the *Pano* as Hindu people who carry the title Patro and with whom Muslims have never been one people. There is no professional specialization within the Muslim

² In fact, below a mango tree and among the rice fields, quite close to the Muslims' *banda* (tank), there is a commemoration stone of the Kondangkel *kili* where once every year a *bonga* is performed and the status of their being *kunt - kati* (first settlers) in the area is publicly affirmed.

community, as all are tailors and traders. As traders they speak and understand Ho, Uriya, Hindi, and Santali. They have a local Bengali as their mother tongue. Today, they add, they have also learned cultivation from the Ho, and some have bought land. Others refer to a First Settlement of 1906, when land "was given to us by the British and even before the British came." Now history is the topic, and many get really excited³. Sheik Abdul begins to lecture: "In the old days we were also Hindu. Actually, we have not migrated here; we have always been here! We are related to a dynasty in Ajmer."

These remarks are revealing for several and different reasons. The information given does not make sense in the academic understanding of history: there was no settlement in 1906; also, in case they had the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act from 1908 in mind, this says that non - tribals cannot acquire tribal land, and Muslims were surely not considered tribal. Moreover, my Santal assistant's comment to enlighten the ignorant anthropologist was: "We call this settlement from 1906 the Permanent Settlement." Even though the Permanent Settlement (see glossary I) from 1793 settles the conditions of revenue collection rather than the conditions of tribal land acquisition, all my informants' references to history underpinned their appreciative assessment of things ancient and past as adding some ultimate flavour of superior authority to a statement. In other words, history is not conceived as a scientific collection of facts and figures structured chronologically in time and space, but rather as the embodiment of the principle of seniority. As such it offers guidance and meaning to the present.

No Pathan in Pathan Sai!

What Ho and Santal people refer to as Pathan Sai⁴, its inhabitants call Muslim Sai. All Muslims in Pathan Sai have been Sheik all along; there is not a single Pathan around! Of their own accord and without my intercepting, the Pathan are being characterized as one of four Muslim *kili*. As regards status differences they rank the four categories Sayed, Sheik, Mongol, and Pathan in this order. Sayed are acknowledged superior status, because they are the direct descendants of the prophet. Sheik come second, followed by the Mongol who have migrated from

³ Whenever a lively discussion like this comes up, I am happy to have decided against a rigid questionnaire beforehand that might force me to interrupt my informants and ask them to please "stick to the point".

⁴ As relates to the Ho usage Deeney denotes *pata* as "a Mohammedan – (This word, originally meaning a Pathan, is used for Mohammedans in general)" (2005: 284) – which really is correct- from the Ho point of view.

Mongolia. Pathan of the title Khan claim a history linking them to Rajasthan and Afghanistan. The four categories are referred to simultaneously as *kili*, *jati*, *kandan* in Urdu, and *bongso* (...).

1.3 Marriage and ancestors

Sheik marry Sheik; they do not marry outside their category. They are very clear and concise about this and explain that there are two ways of finding a spouse for a son. When two brothers have children, these can marry, or, when a brother and a sister have children, these can marry, too. The first model was preferred in former times; nowadays the last one is preferred. They confirm that both, MBD and FZD-marriage is possible. Then Sheik Abdul, the former sardar, smiles and adds: "we call a father's sister's daughter *fufu* or *hatom hon*⁵. Well, I am married to my *fufu*." And: "our mother's sister is our *monsi*, or in Urdu, our *khala*. We would never marry our *monsi's* daughter." If a Ho woman and a Muslim intend to marry, the girl has to convert to Islam first in order to be fully recognized. In case a Muslim girl marries a Ho, she will be outcast. Marriages are arranged. Run - away marriages? No! So, are these the answers that one receives on the normative plane when one interviews people instead of doing participant observation? At least in the case of the Ho there is more to marrying than meets the normative eye.

Inside the Sheik's houses there is no *adin*. What about their ancestors' souls? They are believed to be and stay attached to the graves and the bodies that are buried and not cremated. Once every year all through the night there are readings from the Koran and prayers inside the mosque, also in commemoration of the ancestors. This special night is given as *Shab - E - Barat*, and then the informants become very precise. It is the night preceding the 15th day of the 8th month Sha'ban of the Islamic lunar calendar which again is the month preceding Ramadan. Following that night, all males will go to the burial ground. The ceremonies on behalf of the ancestors inside and outside the mosque are never attended by women.

~~1.4 The village: secular and sacred~~

~~(alles weitere bis auf die conclusion habe ich aus zeitgründen gestrichen)~~

⁵ Sheik Abdul used the Ho term *hatom hon* for FZCh to explain *fufu*.

1.5. Conclusion

As a related and constituent part of the tribal universe the Sheik of Pathan Sai are a category of tailor and trader clients who have settled permanently in the area ever since they were called by the Ho who they recognize as their tribal patrons. They trade their products at the various local markets; in the villages they offer stitching or repair services with the sewing machines fixed at the back of their bicycles. Obviously, there is no social taboo for the Sheik of Pathan Sai to meet with outsiders and discuss aspects of their secular and ritual life. Their rootedness in history, their social organization, and their active religious life centring on the mosque contribute to maintaining close, if distant, in any case reliable relations between clients and patrons. In their Bengali vernacular some essential Ho vocabulary is incorporated. There is a restriction on intermarrying between Muslims and Ho. The practice of shifting from parallel cousin marriage to cross-cousin marriage within an overall endogamous marriage pattern is assessed as a given and accepted fact.