Ritual friendship

When news reached me that my elder brother had died in Germany on February 7, 2016 while I was doing fieldwork among the Ho in Mayurbhanj/ Odisha, I told S. Purty the next day. She reacted in a way that according to my European perception/ understanding was a mixture of sadness, reflectiveness, empathy, respectful distance and at the same time closeness. She referred to my elder brother as her elder brother (*bau*). She sat down contemplating the course of the world (*duku:* suffering; any kind of grief: physical, emotional) and sharing memories of her 10 brothers and sisters with her as the only one still alive. "I wish I was a butterfly, or maybe better a bird", she said. "Then I could fly to your country. I could join you in *diri dulsunum* (secondary burial) and meet our relatives there." We promised to cover my brother's body with the white linen that she would buy and give us the following day. She also gave us *chauli* (husked rice) from their fields and asked us to share it at home with our family (*owa:renko*). S. Purty responded as friends do. S. Purty is my *saki*.

This essay is about ritual friendship as "one of the most important forms of social relationship and found amongst all categories of people" (Mohanty 1973-74, 130) in the tribal societies of middle India. The paper comes in two parts. Part I will introduce the concept(s) and content of ritual friendship as it has been explored in anthropological studies based on fieldwork done in various regions of Odisha and Maharashtra. This part is intended to present observations, interpretations and material that will contribute to better assess the Ho category *saki* and its classification as ritual friend(ship) that part II is about. To my knowledge concepts and practices of this ritual friendship among the Ho, a tribal community in Central Eastern India, have so far not been addressed at all in any depth. It was in fact the anthropologist's *saki* who has proved a reliable 'friend in the field' for more than 10 years by now.

I.

Ritual friendship in middle India: the concept, the content.

Ritual friendship has been variously referred to as ceremonial, bond, institutionalized, arranged or formal friendship, as ‘friendship’, as ritual relation and also as ritual brotherhood (Berger 2007; Desai 2010; Hardenberg 2005; Mohanty 1973-4; Pfeffer 1982,1991, 2001; Skoda 2004, 2006). It is an

analytical 'umbrella' term to conventionally circumscribe a distinctive type of social relationship that may cut across the boundaries of tribe, caste, and kinship. The question is raised whether the term 'ritual friendship' for a *type* of social relation*ship* is appropriate if indigenously people refer to specific *kinds* of ritual friends by specific terms instead. I will stick here with 'ritual friendship' as a working formula for the time being and will replace it by the indigenous term when elaborating on the Ho's *saki* relation in part II.

The issue is debated whether to study ritual friendship within the domain of kinship and according to criteria informed by the study of kinship or as a category in its own right. As a category in its own right ritual friendship has in its various facets been explored for middle India from an anthropological perspective for the Gadaba of district Koraput in the province of Odisha (Mohanty 1973-74, 130-155; Pfeffer 1982:xx, 1991:xx, 2001, 111-114; Berger 2007:173-178), for the Dongria Kond of the Niamgiri Hills (Hardenberg 2005, 82f.,199f.,306), for the Aghria of district Sambalpur (Skoda 2004, 166-177; 2006, 147-166), and for the eastern region[1] of Maharashtra (Desai 2010, 114-132).

According to these scholars, different types of ritual friendship are regionally furnished with different names and distinct, at times overlapping qualities.[2] These differences concern the individual or collective nature and the sacred or profane character of ritual friendship, notions of equality and hierarchy implied in this relationship, the degree of identification of those so related, sentiments such as love and affection implied and expressed, and

[1] Desai did fieldwork in a "multi-*caste* village located in a 'tribal area'" (Desai 2010: 132; my emphasis). However, apart from this reference to a 'tribal area' Desai has chosen not to give the name(s) of the communities among whom he worked, and there is no information whether these are tribal, mixed or otherwise and whether the ethnic composition of the population matters at all in discussing ritual friendship in that region of middle India which is the border zone between Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh. According to Skoda (2004, 2006) the ethnic background of those related as ritual friends matters. Skoda who did fieldwork in a mixed tribal and caste society of north-west Odisha among the Aghria reports that ritual friendship is widespread, but strictly at an inter-community level only and prohibited for Aghria at an intra-community level altogether.

[2] Covering all of Odisha Skoda 2004 gives a compact survey and comparison of relevant forms of ritual friendship such as *mahaprasad, makra, bensagar, sahi, karamdal, sahay and baula, mita, phul, ganga jal.*

the distinction between ritual friendship and 'fictive kinship'. Some of these key features will be looked at in more detail next.

The collective or individual nature of ritual friendship

Ritual friendship may create lasting bonds over several generations between *collectives* or between *individuals*. In both of its forms it creates, at least at the normative level, an arena in which personal ties are unhampered by status distinctions, authority and kinship entanglements. Internally, among the parties included, it is supposed to be safe from disputes and quarrels. Because of its levelling potential, however, the relationship as such may be prone to disapproval from outside as Desai reports from his field (2010, 131, note 17). Ties evolving in the course of and reflected in ritual friendship may be accorded a sacred character depending on the type of relationship (see below for *mahaprasad*). It has been argued that the very concept of ritual friendship as practised in the tribal societies of middle India that are otherwise ordered by hierarchical considerations promotes notions of similarity, equality and even sameness. Moreover, the bond of ritual friendship presupposes just as it brings about mutual respect if not deference, solidarity, sharing and gift-giving among those so related.

In its *collective* form Pfeffer argues for the Gadaba that it "ties together villages as collectives" (Pfeffer 1982: 48). Mohanty confirms the collective form of Gadaba bond friendship as complementary to friendship established between two individuals (Berger 2007: 179, Mohanty 1973-4: 131, 141) to which he refers by *maitar* or *sangat*[3]. According to him collective *mahaprasad* bond relations are a widespread feature and the most durable "group friendship" (Mohanty 1973-4: 145), an "elaborate inter-village bond friendship at the sub-clan level" (ibid.). The collective nature of this type of ritual friendship turns Gadaba villages so related into *mahaprasad* villages in

[3] Mohanty defines a same sex *sangat* relationship (ZHZ/ BWZy: wn. sp.) as "kin-based ritual friendship" (1973-4,146). Among the Ho *sango* is known as a relationship term to refer to an individual ego's classificatory sibling's spouse's sibling representing a joking relation and indicating a category of collective marriageability or prospective spouses. A same sex ritual friend, however, by definition of ritual friendship cannot be a potential marriage partner. Hence, strictly speaking, *sango/ sangat* according to my data is not a ritual friend, at least not among Ho people. In terms of marriageability, Mohanty has the "bisexual" exception of *babu* for the Gadaba (1973 – 4: 148) which may lead to marriage.

reference and their so related members in address into *mahaprasad* or *moitr*.

Mahaprasad moitr friendship is classified as the most sacred of all forms (Mohanty 1973-4: 141, Skoda 2004: 168, Berger 2007: 174), unbreakable and divine as it is sanctioned by divine witnesses (Desai 2010: 119) in ritual and, as Skoda holds for the Aghria, sealed in commensality by sharing *prasad* (leftovers from the gods, a divine gift) with each other, preferably from the Jagannath temple in Puri. Collective forms of friendship are also the focus in Berger's book. Although he refers to Mohanty's term bond-friendship, he nowhere uses the expression of ritual friendship himself and renders *moitr* as "ritual relation" (Berger 2007: 528). He distinguishes three kinds of *moitr* relations connecting and cutting across different "segments" (ibid.: 173, 175) from within "the same (or from different) descent categories" (ibid.). For the Dongria Hardenberg who writes about "friends, 'friends' and friendship" (2005: 82, 199, 201) with and without inverted commas that way avoiding the term 'ritual friendship' altogether reports the collective nature of friendship relations (*tone* for males, *ade* for females) between "whole groups [though] not total clans" (ibid.: 202) and "villages and families" (ibid.: 82), though not between brothers or, as Desai adds, "other close relatives" (Desai 2010: 117). In his book Hardenberg primarily elaborates the bonds created by individual friendship ties across the generations (ibid.: 82-87) as does Desai who does not mention the phenomenon of collective *moitr* at all. I myself have not come across any collective type of ritual friendship among the Ho which, of course, does not mean to say that it does not exist.

In its *individualized* form ritual friendship is forged between two hitherto unrelated same sex individuals (two females or two males) binding simultaneously their 'families' and thus contributing to enduring relationships between them (Skoda 2004: 168, Hardenberg 2005: 82, Desai 2010: 117). According to Desai ritual friendships may be established between any two persons independent of their particular tribe, clan or caste affiliations and irrespective of their specific age or economic situation at the moment of becoming ritual friends - as long as the two friends are "at a similar stage in their lives" (ibid.). As a social resource ritual friendship

'affords' to ignore otherwise relevant social distinctions and boundaries. According to the above authors utilitarian motifs, economic considerations, material concerns or obligations of mutual assistance may not be absent and have in fact been reported, but do not seem to be the major driving force in formalizing a relation as one of ritual friends. Support especially offered as a pure, ideal gift may well be one of the results since ritual friends are expected to give without any expectation of return.

Though formalized, ritual friendship is not non-emotional. Desai and Pfeffer who discusses the *moitr* 'bond-brother' relation in the context of the secondary mortuary rites of the Gadaba are the most explicit in this. Both agree that the idea of love is the base of ritual friendship and its key characteristic differentiating it from the bonds and constraints of kinship and affinity. Desai calls the *mahaprasad* relation a "matter of affection" (2010: 114). *Moitr* relations according to Pfeffer (2001: 113) are likewise non-instrumental in character and based on "mutual devotion [and] love, nothing but pure love" (ibid.: 114). Mohanty echoes this by summing up "noble feelings" (Mohanty 1973-4: 148).

This emotional composition of love, devotion and esteem is complemented in *moitr* friends' dignified (speech) behaviour towards each other. When greeting each other, according to Pfeffer and Mohanty, Gadaba ritual friends bow down deep. Desai adds that in contrast to 'ordinary' friendship ritual friendship is distant, formal, and strictly non-joking (Desai 2010, 128). This last component is notionally developed further by Berger (2007,177) for *mahaprasad* Gadaba into almost an avoidance relation: a high standard of hospitality is expected, but can only with some difficulty be offered to visiting ritual friends at any time, he argues, so the best ritual friends would be those who live in faraway villages. Hardenberg by contrast claims that joking (and demanding at any time) is the very essence of Dongria ritual friends' relationships and that it is joking that brings about the egalitarian bonds. Such fieldwork based observations reveal that at the conceptual level overlapping ideas about ritual friendship of affection and equality allow for variations at the empirical level.

Although it makes sense for analytical reasons to distinguish collective and individual forms of ritual friendship, relations within the latter category reveal notions of embeddedness and collectivity reaching out beyond the two individuals. Evtl. Einschub aus 'Reste':

~~Evtl. Herausnehmen: Concerning the dichotomy of the individual and the collective forms Desai gives a fine example of how in eastern Maharashtra friendship between two men from two different *adivasi* villages led to their eldest sons becoming ritual friends (*mahaprasad*) about eighty years ago. Although the ritual friendship as such was not passed on to the two ritual friends' sons which otherwise is a common and acknowledged practice the closeness of the *mahaprasad* relation still favourably affected those related to the ritual friends as their respective kin or in-laws. On the way and in the process this relationship terminologically included the ritual friends' parents as phul baba and …?, it eventually included an adopted son and inseparably integrated the 'original' two ritual friends' agnatic and affinal kin of both sexes of altogether four generations all of which found its expression in (work) cooperation, commensality, mutual support and invitations including sleeping at each others' houses rather than at their xxxxkins' place in the same village (Desai 2010: 120).~~

Equality, hierarchy, and identification

Ritual friends in middle India address each other reciprocally by specific and identical terms contributing to symbolically manifesting a relationship of and between equals: the taboo on the use of any other forms of address and individual names "superimposes equality in status relations" (Hardenberg 2005: 86). Whereas kinship relations are often associated with "hierarchical distinctions based on relative age, generation or status as an affine or consanguine" (Desai 2010: 12), ritual friendship aims at the "total identification" (Pfeffer 2001: 113). Apart from the identical address identification and sameness are emphasized by *mahaprasad* friends' *jiban* (heart, spirit, life energy) assumed to have virtually merged in the process of transforming into ritual friends (Berger 2007,174; Skoda 2004,168; Desai 2010,121).

Reflected in the idiom of seniority relationship terms - including affinal relationship terms - express hierarchical relations, while friendship terms do not. There are no senior or junior ritual friends. When sealing the friendship in a ritual, status distinctions and hierarchical ordering that will continue to exist outside the ritual relation become quite practically and materially annihilated in an act of commensality by exchanging food and rice-beer, by eating from the same plate, and by using identical address terms.

Ritual friendship and kinship

In terms of the durability, intensity or closeness of the relationship ritual friendship has been characterized as creating a relation *like* brothers. However, it is not imagined as one *of* 'brothers' creating a relation *as* brothers. The difference is important in that the lexical distinctions (like/as) hint at the underlying and opposing concepts of ritual friendship and kinship/brotherhood.

It has been reported for middle India as a common practice over several generations (Hardenberg 2005, 84; Desai 2010, 118) that children of ritual friends can themselves become ritual friends. *If* the relation between two ritual friends were accorded agnatic quality the relation between their same-sex children would be considered agnatic, too. It would then be a relation between two 'brothers' or two 'sisters', and, as elaborated above, ritual friendship between 'brothers/sisters' is ruled out as a cultural possibility.

Marriageability of ritual friends' children?

Clans and *brother* clans are effectively constructed as one category and its members are considered agnatically related *as* kin, in ego's generation *as* brothers (or siblings). As marriage within a clan is prohibited, so is intermarriage with someone of a brother clan. Brothers, classificatory and actual, are kin to each other. *As* brothers, *as* kin they are subject to kinship demands and confines. Brothers are fully rooted in the profane domain of their household management and quite generally in the economics and politics of their respective localized groups. Although bonds between brothers may be among the closest of all kin relations, they are also

"recognized as the most difficult to maintain successfully" (Desai 2010, 123). Their relation by necessity and definition is "interested" (ibid.), while the relation between ritual friends ideologically is not. Whereas before marriage brothers ideally work together for the good of the common undivided household, after marriage or at their father's death there is a risk of jealousy, disputes and quarrels coming up over issues of land and inheritance. The potentially conflictual experience of brotherhood contrasts sharply with the vision of ritual friendship as non-conflictual and free from any such concerns as argued above. Ritual friends are unmolested/unconcerned by kinship responsibilities. Where cooperation among brothers is a kinship demand and obligation, it is ideally a matter of solidarity and commitment among ritual friends.

Ritual friendship and 'fictive kinship'

I will briefly discuss here the concept of 'fictive kinship' in order to show that ritual friendship should notionally neither be conflated with kinship nor with was has been labelled as 'fictive kinship' in discourses on kinship.

According to Desai (2010) and Mohanty (1973-4) in literature on ritual friendship 'fictive kinship' has been variously synonymized with ritual friendship. This is a position I do not share. I rather follow Barnard/Good (1984) who contrast 'fictive' and figurative kinship. According to them 'fictive' or adoptive kinship tends to be *"jurally* recognized as such, in certain *legal* contexts" (ibid.: 150; my emphasis), while figurative or 'ritual kinship' creates relationships such as god-parenthood that are "complementary to kinship rather than an essential part of it" (ibid.), but expressed in the idiom of kinship. An example of 'fictive' kinship in this understanding is Skoda's elaboration of "*Dharma* Kinship" (2004: 172). As intergroup relations among the Aghria and their neighbouring communities and as a category apart from ritual friendship it is about the adoption of daughters and sisters into families with sons only. By creating relationships of siblings between (*dharma*) brothers and (*dharma*) sisters *as* brothers and sisters 'fictive' or adoptive kinship relations are being created among persons of *different* sex who by definition are excluded from becoming ritual friends. For this reason, at least at the level of analysis it does not

make sense to confuse or conflate ritual friendship and 'fictive' kinship. Different from kinship relations and similar to ritual friendship, though, *dharma* relations are accorded a sacred character. Despite their being reckoned as siblings, however, such *dharma* sisters do not live with the family into which they have been adopted nor are they eligible to inherit.

To conclude: ritual friendship in fact deserves to be treated as a category in its own right as postulated in the introduction to the essay. Independent of persons' clan, caste or kinship affiliations, their ethnic background, gender or age different types of bond friendship link different units of the segmentary societies of middle India in individual or collective ways thus contributing to creating a landscape of non-hierarchical relatedness. This landscape is inhabited by ritual friends constructed as equal individuals or by whole groups and villages that are linked by long-term relations based on mutual respect, affection and commitment. The 'honorific' character of the relation is reflected in the honorific language as has been shown above. Social cohesion comes structurally alive at contrasting, yet complementary layers: the same people that experience/live out the value of similarity/sameness as implied in the ideology of ritual friendship experience and live out the idea and value of hierarchical distinctions as expressed in the idiom of seniority and implied in the ideology of kinship relations.

II.

Crossing tribal boundaries: the saki relation

Introduction

This is an ethnographic report of the process of a *saki* relation coming into being, its gender implications, its kinship linkages and its being lived out as the authoress of this paper and her husband have experienced it in the course of fieldwork among Ho and Santal in Odisha and Jharkhand, India.

Quite generally s*aki*, literally meaning 'witness; namesake; to name after another' (Deeney 2005: 324), is a ritual ~~friendship~~ relation widespread in Ho country and relating Ho, Santal and members of other communities in the region of research and beyond. By *saki* Ho people linguistically refer to a particular single person, usually to a living 'friend' in address and reference

and not to an abstract noun, a generic term or the relation*ship* as such. If one does not rule out the possibility of a linguistic and semantic correspondence between Ho *saki* and Hindi *sakhi* the gendered specificity of the relationship as I experienced it in the field comes in since in Hindi *sakhi* denotes a '*female* friend, companion' (Gatzlaff-Hälsig 2002: 1304; my emphasis) and 'a woman's or girl's *female* friend' (McGregor 2011: 972; my emphasis). An element of the sacred and 'attitude of religious devotion' is emphasized in compounds with *sakhi* as one of its elements (McGregor 2011: ibid.).

In fact, it was to a considerable extent the *saki* relation or rather the *saki* persons who initiated us into the field, who by formalizing our relation as *saki* authorized our being "there", who contributed to our becoming–social beings and who proved a constant and reliable source of valuable information. Besides there being other sincere and serious informants, Ch. Purty, one of our *saki*, was centrally involved in the rituals at village level[4] and in all kinds of village affairs as village elder (*munda*),. As *munda* he kept being asked by fellow villagers to act as witness and mediator. As our *saki* he had committed himself to taking us along and introducing us into Ho culture. He really took the time to make us understand. While others understandably grew impatient, became confused or got lost as I not only once did myself[5], for example, when working through the genealogical relations of their individual pedigrees and generations of remembered forefathers, he kept going on. As the villagers trusted him, so did we.

More than that, apart from initially being ignorant concerning the dos and don'ts implied in a *saki* relation at the behavioural level, we were for quite

[4] Plate 3 shows him (far right) lying on the ground worshipping Mother Earth in the course of *Mage Porob* along with the ritual guide (*diuri*) of the area (plate 3, far left). Verwenden? Sind fotos erwünscht?

[5] The relations within our *saki's mandi chaturenko* have been published in Reichel 2009. It took me several times to take notes, sort them out, make sense of them and get them confirmed. While working through the generations along the grid as Barnard/ Good suggest (xxxx), I got really lost one day. I kept to the two questions: how do you address her/him *(chikaiyaben*)? How does she/he address you (*chikabenae:*)? Although my *saki* was clearly interested in all kinship related matters and willing to cooperate I observed how tiring this procedure was for him (and how confusing for me). So when again I asked my *saki* the first question, I received an answer and almost mechanically made a note of it. But when I asked the second question, my *saki* looked puzzled and eventually said: "don't be silly, he can't even talk!" Without realizing the generational depth, I had enquired about my *saki's* FFBSSSS that had been born just a few months before.

some time quite insecure what it was exactly that we had been offered at the categorical level in the first place: Was it a ritual friendship, was it a kind of ritual or fictive kinship? A mixture of both or different from both? Indeed, the use of relationship terms for our male *saki's* agnatic and affinal kin initially confused me a lot - so much so that for some time I was convinced that the *saki* relation was first and foremost some kind of a kinship relation rather than anything else. Tensions and linkages between *saki* and kinship relations will be elaborated in this part of the paper.

Of course, we felt privileged for having been offered a *saki* relation right at the outset of our stay. After all, here we were given the chance of experiencing and simultaneously observing the relation from 'within'. We became part, we were part *of* it, we did not just talk *about* it as a theoretical possibility of being related in an abstract way.

Establishing the saki relation

In hindsight things developed really fast and kept taking us by surprise. To better understand the context within which the *saki* relation was being established, the setting is outlined as follows:

For the purpose of doing fieldwork my husband and I had been offered an empty house in Manbir by the villagers there. It was a proper *diku* site for *diku* people like us: a former single-room government *pakka* building that had fallen into disuse, an alien architectural something. We were informed that the villagers had met and discussed first, before they finally agreed on having us stay among them and in this house. This took a few days. We remained outside the process of decision-making, and I have no knowledge who was included. But news may have spread announcing our arrival, since on the second day after our moving in G. Hansda from Santal Sai, a hamlet of village Taran and itself adjacent to village Manbir, to our amazement banged at the door, introduced and advertised himself as our assistant.[6] He turned out to be fluent in Santali, Ho, Hindi, Odiya, and English (and has knowledge of Pali and Sanskrit as well). As at that time we were utterly

[6] In the meantime, he has imagined himself as my son and me as his mother. I learnt later that as his classificatory (Ho) mother I have inherited his actual (Santal) mother's *saki* relations such as that to his *kaki* (FByW).

averbal in terms of the Ho language we welcomed the possibility of collaborating with someone who was rooted locally, married and father of two sons. He agreed to accompanying and introducing us into the area and to the people. *Disum amin – disum nam*, the narration of the Holon Purty clan as the first settlers in the area, is a result of the three of us walking through the rice-fields and eventually meeting Ch. Purty in some courtyard of a Ho house. As *munda* Ch. Purty had been asked to negotiate a mortgage of some consequence for a fellow-villager. When this job was done everyone stayed on while he narrated the Ho's 'history' of their settlement in the area. Like everyone else we were sitting on string cots (*karkom*) and listening, G. Hansda was translating. This happened on the 5th day of us being in the field, at 7 o'clock in the morning. It was our first encounter with Ch. Purty. Of course, we had not coincidentally met him, as G. Hansda knew of his appointment in the morning and had arranged for us to meet him there just as it was no coincidence that he suggested a few days later to walk along the embankments between the harvested rice-fields from Santal Sai to the *munda*'s house in Pathan Sai. I thoroughly enjoyed these early morning walks at sunrise as a protected and safe way of learning about 'the field' and gaining vital orientation. When we had almost reached the *munda*'s house approaching it from the back, a woman was there cleaning the yard. She was the *munda*'s wife, perhaps in her sixties as I. Not at all taken aback when seeing us and obviously on familiar terms with G. Hansda, but surprisingly to me without any form of greeting though not at all unfriendly, she looked at me closely, pointed first at her grey hair, then at my even greyer hair, inquired if I was a Ho and suggested that she and I become *saki* to each other. This was all. She turned round and continued her work. Her husband was not at home. We left.

The entire encounter had been a matter of a few minutes. In my field diary it materialized into one or two lines. The meaning and content of the *saki* relation would unfold to me only gradually by living it out in the course of fieldwork. However, the very practical and immediate next steps to be *done* were announced in a first talk (*jagar*) with the *munda* and his wife soon afterwards.

We were invited to their house as soon as my *saki* had prepared a pot of rice-beer (*diyan*) which during the cold season usually takes four days. This time we were greeted the Ho way and taught how to do it properly.[7] While S. Purty, hostess and later *saki*, kept ladling out the rice-beer to all of us into steel glasses, my male *saki* did most of the talking, and with an air of dignified serenity, as follows:

My (female) *saki* and I would address each other from now on as *saki*, and as *saki* only. Because of that her husband and my husband had instantaneously become related as *saki*. From this followed that the *munda* and I became also related as *saki* just as the *munda's* wife and my husband became *saki* to each other. All the four of us would address each other from now on reciprocally as *saki* as all of us would be equally and reciprocally *saki* to each other.[8] There would be two ceremonies to seal the *saki* relation. He invited us for the first ceremony to be held at his house, following which it would be our turn to host the second ceremony at our place. We were informed, and in great earnest, that on the occasion of the first ceremony it was our duty to bring along *saki lija: (lija:* : cloth) which relates to a new *saree*[9] and a (white) *dhoti* for our *saki*. We should also bring along two necklaces that we were asked to make from the blossoms of flowers of our choice. The rest would be provided by them – whatever the rest was.[10] The

[7] The proper Ho way of greeting (*jowar*) is preceded by/ linked to being offered with both hands a jar filled with water. On receiving it one lifts the jar with both hands a little upwards while simultaneously slightly bowing one's head. Outside every Ho house there is a fixed site for the purpose of washing one's hand and feet (*abun*) by pouring water from the jar. One then takes a sip of water into the palm of the right hand (*jom ti*), gurgles with it and spits out the water. With a similar gesture as before the jar is handed back. The host, usually the female head of the house (*owa:rini:*) will then empty the jar completely, refill it and hand it over to the next guest. Only after everybody has completed this procedure, one will be asked to sit down.

[8] 'Poetic parallel' is the linguistic phenomenon which is the Ho way of doubling the meaning when expressing parallel content in parallel phrases and in parallel syntax. As the example above shows, this speech behaviour is not restricted to ritual situations.

[9] When I showed my non-Ho neighbours, members of the category General in Manbir the saree that I had bought for my *saki* without mentioning the *saki* ceremony they immediately sensed the context and responded: 'so this is a Sambalpuri saree as *saki lija:*?' This shows that not only the *saki* relation as such is known among other non-Ho communities in the area, but that they as non-Ho refer to certain elements of the relation by identical Ho terms. Moreover, my data confirm existing *saki* relations between Ho and members of the Gau (cowherder) community.

[10] At that time I was not yet able to ask questions in the Ho language myself, our male *saki* did not tell us and our assistant refused to translate as he considered himself competent to answer the questions himself. In this initial situation a structurally problematic aspect of assistantship in fieldwork became visible that would continue to cause irritations.

exact day of the first ceremony would be announced to us in time by him. G. Hansda was requested to come along, too, and act as witness.[11] We were told that from now on their door was open to us anytime. We were asked to learn the Ho language fast.

This get-together was the first of its kind of those four persons who would constitute the core of the *saki*-relation. The encounter was formal in character, instructive and strictly non-explanatory in terms of content. We were given here a script, a matrix of the technicalities to be followed, of what was to be *done* in a known order. Almost as an aside we were made to understand that the *saki* relationship was not meant as an addition of two distinct relationships, as a case of my *saki* and me on the one hand as separate from, opposed or complementary to my husband and his *saki* on the other. Elegantly and almost inconspicuously, the *saki* relation as one of same sex individuals included another pair of *saki* of the opposite gender affiliated as we concluded by similar age and marital status.[12]

The saki relation within the web of kinship

After that we frequently met, usually at the *munda*'s and his wife's house, usually at dawn or in the later evening, after the cultivation work was done and before the *saki* relationship was sealed in the upcoming ceremonies.

Our two *saki* lived by themselves in a modest house. Their only son had died young and their only daughter was married in Kuleibira, a village at a distance of less than two hours walk on foot. She was frequently visiting with her children. Our male *saki*'s three younger brothers lived with their families in houses adjacent to our *saki*'s sharing the same courtyard, as is usual in Ho country. While we were sitting with our *saki*, often their nephews and nieces, reciprocally and irrespective of gender *gungu*[13]

[11] This does not seem to have been an arbitrary or pragmatic decision in order to provide us with a competent translater as I had initially thought. Only quite some time later did I find out that my (female) *saki* and Guru's *kaki* (FByW) had become *saki* when they were young (*see* footnote 6).

[12] The aspect of similarity has been elaborated in part I of this paper-

[13] *Gungu* in the sense of nephews and nieces here refers to my male *saki's* younger brothers' children. Otherwise, in the same generation, a woman's/wife's younger sisters' children are also addressed as *gungu*, but not all the others that in a German kinship frame refer to as nephews and nieces such as a man's sisters' children (*ge-kowa, ge-kui)* or his elder brothers' children (*hon-sed, hon-era)* or a woman's brothers' children (*homon-kowa, homon-kui*) or her elder sisters' children (*hon-kowa, hon-era*).

(ByCh/mn.sp. - HByCh/wn.sp) to them and *gungu* to us, were around listening, leaving and returning. Time and again also the brothers came around for a short chat and good laugh which started instantly as soon as they spotted me[14], or their wives. From the very beginning the developing *saki* relation was no socially isolated affair. It could not have been, because wherever and whenever we met, others were there and continuously so. When meeting at our *saki*'s house these others usually, but not only, were their kin living there. They addressed us and introduced their children to us in quite a matter-of-fact way just as we were told how to address them. It was never meant as or limited to an indoor activity, but displayed in public as a value to be proud of. That way we learned about kinship relations, how they are lived, and about linkages between *saki* and kinship relations.

Plate xx: The web of kinship gifted along with the saki relation in generations -1 and -2.

Gungu? Jai-hon? Ge-tadi? Homon? Boronja? Hon-kowa? Hon-kui? Hon-sed?

It turned out that the agnatic and affinal kin of my male *saki* became included in the *saki* relationship as follows: while obviously my husband was becoming identified with his male *saki*, the *munda*, I was becoming

My *saki*'s daughter's six children, their grandchildren, on the other hand were *jai-hon* to them and us, while we were *jiyan* ('my' grandmother) or *tatan* ('my' grandfather) to them. Although analytically one generation below the level of *gungu* as elaborated above, empirically the distinction in nomenclature of almost equally old children was hard for me to remember since it presupposed that I was able to exactly trace the relation between any child and my *saki*.

[14] This kind of roaring laughter was exclusively directed towards me and not towards my husband (who reacted with a note of jealousy). It was immediately to be sensed that there was some cultural reasoning and social grounding to it in that the immediacy of the response when seeing me was confidently, selectively and regularly acted out. Not denying the possibility of a 'genuine' display of 'authentic spontaneity' among two individuals, this extrovert behaviour seemed to reveal something else (see below for *joking relationship* in this paragraph; see also Vitebsky 1993 who treats feelings - given the socio-cultural context of his fieldwork among the Sora - not as innate, but as socially informed exterior states and hence anthropologically observable).

identified with my female *saki,* the *munda*'s wife. In other words: whoever was agnatic kin to my male *saki,* became agnatic kin to my husband and affinal kin to me. This was reflected in the relationship terms. Whereas my husband/ 'his' *saki* addressed the *munda*'s younger brothers as *undin*, my *saki*/I addressed them as HBy or *iril*. We two were *hili* (BeW) to them. The *hili-iril* relation is a joking relation, and the relation I had with the *munda*'s brothers - different from that of my husband's who was elder brother (*bau*) to them- was my introduction into the sphere and character of joking relationships which until then I had encountered in my anthropological study books only and rather disbelievingly so. On the other hand, while 'my' *saki* and I by identification addressed 'our' husbands' younger brothers' wives as *undi-kui* and had joking relations with their husbands (*iril-hili*), my husband by identification 'inherited' his *saki*'s avoidance/respect relations existing between him and his younger brother's wives (*kimin - bau-honyar*).

The 'avoidance' between a man and his younger brothers' wives is such that not even the address term *kimin* may be expressed/ spoken out aloud. It created some difficulty when we worked through my male *saki's* pedigree and he was unable to pronounce the proper relationship term for his ByW. He whispered something into my assistant's ear and spelt the term into his palm with his right finger instead. It also showed in a situation, as already outlined above, when we were being offered *jowar (*formal welcome*)* by the same physical person: while I was given by my *undi-kui* (HByW) a warm smile and, with both hands, the pot of water into my two hands to wash hands and feet (*abun*), the same pot, refilled, was put on the floor for my husband, while his *kimin* (ByW) carefully avoided any eye – contact from where he had to pick it up and put it back.

Distinctions in identification

Ours is a case of two married couples, the *saki* relation hence embracing four persons of mixed gender. By addressing each other reciprocally by one identical term notions of identification and equality bridging also gender distincions seem to suggest themselves linguistically. The idea of identification materializes, however, differently as I will argue and illustrate

in this paragraph, and at various layers within and beyond the *saki* relation. The examples given in this paragraph will show that the degree of identification is context and gender sensitive. It is not identical for and among the four *saki* persons alike.

In my interpretation the structural identification with 'my' female *saki* is more complete and comprehensive than that with my male *saki*. The preceding paragraph argued that her kinship relations – agnatic and affinal – are identically constructed as mine, while I conceive of my male *saki's* kinship relations exclusively through my female *saki's* perspective. Thus, whereas notions of total identification, equality and sameness are lived out and, as my fieldwork data show, restricted to those two related as same-sex *saki*, hierarchical distinctions come in and continue to exist outside the very *saki* structures - as soon as the *saki* relations become accomodated within existing and affiliated kinship relations, as the examples of being grouped with adverse, i.e. joking and avoidance relationships above have shown.

Gender distinctions within the *saki* relation keep being relevant. The gender divide may even contribute to and intensify the notion of total identification among same sex *saki* within a wider ritual context. Two examples will illustrate this:

The first example concerns my having participated in a secondary burial (*diri dulsunum*) at Pathan Sai in 2006 of which relevant aspects concerning my *haga*-ness have been outlined above (see "*Mmc and hagako*"). I have argued that due to my being related to my same sex *saki* I was invited and also classified as *haga,* though differently from her. The anlysis of the same situation is continued here focussing on how gender distinctions and the issue of graded identification come in as follows:

The complex of raw food exchanges the technicalities of which were given above were an utterly female affair. Moreover, the rite of *mid jom* (to become one by eating) in the course of which the food cooked by me was exchanged, fed, and eaten up was a strictly female affair. As plate 12 shows, it was one including my *saki*, the widow and myself. In performing the rite different roles were being distinguished and became "paired" (Desai

2010:xxx). By acting out my role as host and serving the food that I had prepared to the widow and me without eating herself in the temporary hut that was assigned to my husband and me, my *saki* underpinned the total identification between herself and me as *saki* in *this* situation. To underpin the total identification in *this* situation of the widow and me we two – as two differently discriminated *haga* persons - were made one in a rite of the same name (*mid jom*). The total identification of my *saki* and the widow was underpinned by the two of them being related by the same *kili*, by being ranked as 'full' *haga,* by staying in the same (main) house together, by jointly visiting and attending to their *bala*.

This example of *saki, haga* (and *bala*) participating in a secondary burial is another instance of how the *saki* relation may immediately become relationally accommodated within a specific socio-ritual context and of how the same sex *saki* relation of two women may become dominant to the exclusion of the opposite sex *saki* relation in a specific situation. My husband, invited as I was to the funerary rites and present as I was, played no part *in this*. He remained the observer (and fotographer) and hence outside – as did his *saki* who remained absent throughout this part of the proceedings.

Plate 12: Haga and saki: distinctions in identification

Jom mid (ritual commensality: to become one in eating) at diri dulsunum (secondary burial) in Pathan Sai, February 2006. Left: my saki preparing plates from sal tree leaves after serving the food to the deceased's widow (middle) and me (right).

The second example will illustrate the reverse situation. It relates to *Ba Porob* (*ba*: flower), the great annual village festival in February/March following *Mage Porob* in the month before.

March 1st 2010 was the day after full moon in Pathan Sai. I had without any difficulty been able to observe the rituals performed by the *diuri* and his men from outside the sacred grove (*desauli*) quite by myself. Many hours later, my male *saki* and one of his younger brothers, my *iril*, arrived. I followed them inside the *desauli* when it had become too dark to make photographs without using flashlights, when the ritual chanting was over and the sacrificing was done. Over the years I had got used to my assistant not turning up for an appointment at all or only many hours later as could easily happen with my *saki,* who as *munda* had to live up to many fellow villagers' expectations. In the long run, this being left to myself over and over again strengthenend my independence and autonomy, and I became accustomd to being allowed to observe almost anytime and participate and in almost everything (or so I thought), accompanied or unaccompanied. I had translated the concept of identification implied in the *saki* relation into the unlimited/unhampered ? possibility of being allowed – as their *alter ego* - to be (physically present) whereever and whenever they were (physically present). Depending on context and situation the value of identification could, however, become graded, a matter of degrees, as the continuation will show.

This time joining my *saki* and his brother felt quite different, almost uncomfortable. I wondered if I had unruly trespassed into the sacred site? My presence before had been tolerated for many hours, but all of that time I had been outside the *desauli*. The moment came when the sacrificial meat was ready to be eaten. It was wrapped up in sal leaves (*sarjom sakam*). It had been prepared and baked by the *diuri* and his men (*diuriteko*) in fires made from logs of a sal tree and eventually distributed to the various parties

sitting in individual sacrificial sites enclosed by rings of stones to mark the boundaries around them just as the *desauli* as such was circled in by stones. The atmosphere became increasingly tense after the distribution of the meat. My *sakin* and his brother were quarrelling complaining about the *diuri*'s portions being larger than theirs, about their portions being too small, the *diuri*'s too big, and where were their two other brothers? Something seemed to go awfully wrong - and then I was instructed: wouldn't I see that the sacrificial animal was a *kowa merom* (ziegenbock/male goat), everybody who attended were *kowako* (males), the *bonga* meat was *kowa jilu (*male meat), it was prepared by *kowako* (men) for *kowako* (men), hence it would be eaten by *kowako* (men) and not by *kuiko* (men). It was true, while otherwise rituals are publicly performed and observed from outside the sacred grove by women and children of both sexes over large periods of time, with *Ba Porob* there were no more females around as soon as it had got dark. They had been there before and they would be back again later to dance all through the night. I had not realized. Should I leave? My *saki* seemed deeply relieved that I asked of my own accord and that he therefore did not have to send me off. My husband, on the other hand, had been invited four years ago to stay on and participate until late at night (while I had not been present at all). So the restriction for me four years later came unexpected.

It does make cultural sense, however, in several respects: on the one hand it opened my eyes to the predominantly male character in some, not all phases of *Ba Porob*.This is the Ho's hunting festival which includes a shooting competition in the course of which the excellence of the most competent person to hit a target with bow and arrow during complete darkness is being rewarded by decorating him behind his ears with the white flowers of the sal tree picked from the *desauli*.

It revealed on the other hand that a *bonga* performed at village level and addressed to their highest (male) god *Sinbonga* also ideologically ranks highest. In a *bonga* at village level the *desauli* is the sacred meeting ground where representatives of the Ho are the ritual hosts of their gods and spirit world who are not only invited but assumed to physically be present and

who hence must be addressed in a state of utmost purity. Representatives chosen for this purpose such as the ritual guide and his men (*diuritekin*) enjoy divine recognition, as the gods have puiblicly signalled consent to their becoming elected in a ritual called *mad pata xxx*. Hence they are trusted to command the rules and norms of purity. These have not been defined by humans for humans. They are conceived to be rooted in Ho mythology, anchored in Ho elders' memory, demanded and in fact dictated by the rituals themselves. Ho people do not say that a *bonga* is being performed, but that they 'obey a ritual's orders' (*bongareya: kaji manatin*) thus attributing rituals ontological qualities. Of course, the supraindividual socio-cosmic values that are celebrated in the course of their great village festivals rank superior over considerations of a *saki* relation that is man-made and acted out at an individual level.

Lastly, this restriction taught a lesson in terms of afore mentioned different degrees of identification: As I became fully identified with my (female) *saki* by being excluded from parts of the ritual and the sacrificial food, my husband had become fully identified with his male *saki* by being included all of the time, inside the *desauli*, and by being offered a share of the sacrificial meat.

As I have experienced the *saki* relation it is generally complemented by social relations surrounding it horizontally and vertically. It is conceptualized as one to transgress generational, local, and tribal boundaries in time. While I was initially convinced that something quite exceptional, exclusive and unique was happening to me in the present in a given locality, I eventually came to realize that there was a historical and translocal dimension structurally attached to it in which the *saki* relation was embedded. Unaware of it at the time, I had become linked to a web of *saki* relations having existed for at least two generations among Ho and Santal people and reaching out as far as Tatanagar affording me with *saki* relations there. The process of inclusion is a continuous one. Even after so many years I am not sure if I can represent it in its entirety.

Doing the saki relation: Content and meaning

In the course of time we were being constructed by our *saki* into Ho whose ancestors had left Ho country long ago, who had forgotten all about their cultural background and who had eventually come back to learn from scratch. In our country we would be the only Ho. There would not be any other Ho. As such we were introduced when we accompanied especially our male *saki* on his numerous errands. There is a gate between us and them, he would say, but so far only we have gone through it. As our *saki* it was his duty (*man*, literally: respect), pleasure (*suku*) and pride (*mamaran*), he continued, to reintroduce us into Ho 'culture' (*Ho-reya: kaji*: matters of/ related to the Ho). It was as if he was "grafting" in R. Hertz's understanding (1907:xxx) the *saki* relation upon us, as if the *saki* relationship itself was an accomplishment – for him and for us - transforming us into more accomplished, more complete social beings. He explained to others (without ever having talked to us about it) that the lack of our knowledge as concerns Ho language and culture was due to our lack of interaction. That way the idea was conveyed that Ho 'culture' is what you *do*[15], that it is something that is being *done*, and that learning (about) and acquiring Ho culture is the result of *doing* it, of *practicing* it along *with others*. The *saki* relation itself is a way of *being* rather than of *having*. It then makes sense that in the first encounter when we expected to be introduced to the concept of the *saki* relation, its content and meaning, we were instead told what to *do* and in which order.

In the process of our Ho identity construction as we interpreted it it was mainly my *saki* who *did* things with me (see below), while it was my male *saki* who set the agenda of our necessary education and did most of the talking/information work (*jagar paiti*). It was he who decided that we needed to know about the 'history' of the Purty settlement because it was to become our 'history' and the Holon Purty myth of origin (preceding sub-chapters) as it was to become our story of origin. We learnt about Ho ancestry and the social dimension of death, when the Holon Purty *miyad mandi chaturenko* (Reichel 2009) was elaborated and else when

[15] Verardo 2003 similarly refers to a ritual that she translates as "Doing the clan" ceremony.

participating in a secondary funeral in *Pathan Sai* as *haga* (see sub-chapter above on '*mmc and hagako'*), about diachronic Ho marriage patterns and the value of affinity (next sub-chapter), about marriage negotiations and *gonon* (bridewealth) that our *saki* was asked to moderate and that we were welcomed to join, about Ho cosmology that he liked to enlarge upon along with his brothers and other co-villagers in the evenings when the cultivation work was done for the day, and about the Ho version of the creation of the world.

Doing the saki relation: my saki

Plate 1: S. Purty, my saki.

My saki and I prepare ranu for rice-beer (*diyan*), a purely female activity (but for ritual rice-beer: *ti chipa rasi*, see foto … Ranu – in its effect similar to yeast - is a mixture of rice flour (holon) and herbs that we collected in the jungle. After a process of drying between rice straw (see foto) some ranu balls are crushed and mixed with rice (mandi) which has previously been cooked and then cooled down. The mixture is put back into an earthen pot (mandi chatu) and water is added in order to cause fermentation. The pot is covered with leaves from the sal tree (sarjom daru). The mixture is not stirred or touched in between, but time and again the leaves are lifted, the up-coming tiny bubbles will be watched and listened to as they produce

the much awaited and soft gurgling sounds. Depending on the outside temperature the process will take three to four days (*diyan unupudre*). The procedure reminded me a lot of the stages of preparing sour dough for baking bread at home including the very specific quite intense smell of fermenting grains.

The saki ceremonies

While we were dancing on the *Akara* (the dancing ground; the meeting place of males for the political discussion of village affairs and decision making; the arena for a cockfight) on the first day of *Mage Porob* in Pathan Sai on February 14th, 2006 we were requested (*asi*) by the *munda* to see him at his house. There we were informed that the first of the two *saki* ceremonies was to be held at 10 o'clock two days later which coincided with the last day of *Mage Porob*, also called *mage moroe:* (sour, acid) or *har (*to chase) *mage*. Apart from *saki-lija* and flower garlands we were asked to also bring salt and rice (*chauli*). Our assistant, his wife and his *wife's female* relatives from Bagrai Sai (see maps above) were invited, too. At that point I was already beginning to wonder if there was a female bias implied in the *saki* relation or if there was another objective, rational reason that I did not understand. I was decorated for the occasion by my assistant's wife who dressed me up in a newly bought *saree,* forced both my hands through some of her bangles and applied *sinduri* in my hair as married Santal women do saying this is an utterly tribal thing to do and most married Ho women refuse to do saying this is no tribal thing at all. She was unhappy about my short hair cut, as she unsuccessfully tried, but would have liked to produce some kind of a knot as married Santal and Ho women have. She, her relatives and children would set off only four hours later.

When my husband and I arrived both *saki* - as usual - ignored us completely. They leisurely and in full concentration continued the work they were busy doing inside the house, while two helping hands were cutting up a goat outside in the courtyard into three equal parts. One part was meant to be prepared by us (it would eventually be my assistant's wife to take over), another part by our *saki* (it would eventually be our *saki*'s daughter to take

over). Both parties would work separately, but side by side they would use the two cooking sites facing east in their open kitchen. The third part would be cooked by my (female) *saki* inside the *adin* (secluded, sacred part of the kitchen) which neither I nor my husband were ever allowed to enter, neither here nor anywhere else. The *adin* in fact was the site that strongly relativized any illusion of complete identification.

After quite some time our *saki* had finished their work: goats and rabbits were attended to and the room where they were usually kept (*merom owa:* : goats' house) had been emptied completely and purified by plastering the floor carefully with cowdung. This was to become the room where the ritual meal (*jom mid*) would take place later. The floor in the 'reception area', usually the living cum sleeping room, had been beautified by applying a darkish dye that was won by boiling the bark of a tree for many hours. Two earthen pots with *diyan* and *rasi* were placed in a corner of this room where first the ritual exchange of rice beer (*nuimid*) and later the third part of the *saki* ceremony was to take place. Here mats were spread out. Already at this point it becomes obvious - when taking all these preparations into consideration - that there is more to the *saki* ceremony than those inconspicuous five minutes that Desai (2010:xx) cuts it down to.

Eventually we were offered water by my *saki* from a brass pot to wash our hands and feet (*abun*). This was done as described above, only that this time, before handed over and received back, the pot was lifted upwards as far as the forehead. The procedure was not only done on my husband and myself, but I was taught how to do it on our two *saki*, too. Immediately after this purification procedure and as if caused by it a metamorphosis took place. Whereas when arriving we were practically treated as physically non-present, the atmosphere was still slightly distanced when being offered the jar for *abun* until it completely and visibly changed for the *jowar* procedure. Such sudden changes, literally from one instance to the other, kept keeping us by surprise. They were, however, most usual among Ho people as we experienced in the course of fieldwork when for example in the case of death visiting female relatives began their intense ritual wailing with 'authentic' tears flowing down their cheeks the very instant they entered

the deceased's compound – and they would be able to stop crying just as instantaneously (see "Prologue" in Reichel 2009) as soon as they left.

We were *jowared* in the friendliest and most elegant Ho manner with our heads visibly bent towards our *saki* standing opposite us while simultaneously sucking in the air noisily. We were invited to sit down on a ritual mat – same sex *saki* opposite each other, our assistant and another male person from Manbir he had asked to come along as one more witness and who was classified as *haga* next to us. While the four *saki* first have *rasi* (rice liquor) in cups (*pu:*) made from sal leaves by my *saki*, the others have *diyan* (rice-beer) all taken from the earthen pots that are covered with sal leaves. In the second round we all have *diyan*, however only the four *saki* will perform the *nuimid* (to become one by drinking) ritual as follows: my husband and his *saki* drink a sip from their respective glasses, then they pour a sip each into the other one's glass to fill it up. This is repeated once again. After the second exchange of *diyan* both will drink up their glasses. My *saki* and I do basically the same, only that we are exchanging the *diyan* three times, before we drink it up. The witnesses do not take part in the exchange of *diyan*, but are present and included in the ceremony as witnesses. Included are also our *saki'*s relatives, his younger brothers, their wives and children, all of whom have suddenly turned up during the *nuimid* ritual and are introduced to us – and we to them – by giving the respective relationship terms. Within a few minutes we are 'officially' taught – and expected to learn by heart - our kinship relations of three generations that the *saki*-relation has linked us to. While it dawns on my husband and me that this is going to be hard work to remember the terms, recognize the people and relate both, some of our *gungu* come to us, take our hands, press them and try to get really close cuddly? with us (see plate 11 above) while especially the youngest of my *iril* (HBy), contrastingly to the other two who are also present but markedly reserved, becomes impressively extrovert cracking one joke after the other none of which we understand. It is he who will be present for the ritual food exchange (*jom mid*), while his two brothers are not. It is only he who will accompany us later to a wedding, along with our two *saki,* into the village of his elder brother's daughter, his *hon-era*. He is

also the one accompanying his elder brother, my *saki,* to the *desauli* at Ba Porob in 2010, while his brothers stayed away.[16]

There are duties waiting for us. We have to ignite the fire in the hearth and feed it with firewood (*san*) from the sal tree, we have to cook rice, prepare a vegetable curry and the meat - it is going to be a whole day's affair, and we are glad when our assistant's wife arrives and takes over, i.e. she inconspicuously supports and teaches us and helps us rehearsing the relationship terms, because she knows not only how everybody is related to her, but how everybody is reciprocally related to my husband and, differently from him, to me. she does not take over completely making sure that my husband keeps being involved in the preparations, as if not only eating together but also preparing together is part of the ritual'.

Reste, aus part I verschoben: einarbeiten?

Moreover, I was emotionally quite overwhelmed by my husband and me being offered the *saki* relation 'out of the blue' – after all we were both fresh in the field and fully ignorant of the Ho language then - and obsessed with finding out what this specific relation implied. And how were we supposed/expected to behave?

Although elaborated in part II, the Ho's *saki* relation may illustrate the point here. It represents an individualized form of ritual friendship for the reason that in my case it began by being initiated between two (female) individuals. It then immediately sparked off into a wider network by including familiar, i.e. already existing social relations and eventually included our respective families. Only later did I find out that the *saki* relation with the *munda*'s wife was itself embedded within an already existing trans-tribal net of *saki* relations all of which I have inherited by initially becoming the *munda*'s wife's *saki*. So characterizing the *saki* relation as an individualized type of ritual friendship does not mean it is socially disinterested and isolated from the social net within which the individuals involved lead their profane and ritual lives. In *this* respect the

[16] This refers to the situation mentioned above that eventually led to my exclusion from the ritual (see "Distinctions in identification"). To this day I have not been able to make sense of these distinctions in behaviour.

individualzing aspect is a relative rather than an absolute feature. It signifies a point of departure into a diachronic process of establishing a wider union of relations.

Moreover, the language of ritual friendship is equally and reciprocally honorific: depending on context Ho people may address others informally by the colloquial 2nd pers.sg. personal pronoun 'you' (*am)*, whereas ritual friends will also in informal situations address each other literally by 'you two' (*aben)* which is the dual honorific form of the pronoun expressing respect. This was at least one of the first instructions I was given after the *saki* ceremony.

Ritual friendship among young children is often sealed on their parents' initiative (Majumdar 1950:xx; Hardenberg 2005:xx; Desai 2010:). In the case of Ho and Santal this may happen soon after birth viz. after the naming ceremony, but also at a(ny) later stage. My Santal assistant whom I frequently accompanied when his wife, my *kimin* (daughter-in-law) sent him on some errand, was constantly in search of spotting a suitable *saki* for his roughly 6-year-old son. This was how I learnt that Santal people in that area value that social resource, too, make use of it themselves, refer to it by the identical Ho term and conceive of it in similar ways. When eventually my assistant thought he had perhaps found a suitable boy who was roughly the same age, he actually became increasingly agitated whenever they met which was usually on the way to the market in the next market town. Wouldn't I think that he behaved quite similarly to his own son who was a very curious, creative and funny young boy, agile, active, outgoing, communicative and self-confident. And wouldn't that other boy even look a little similar? Such aspects of similarity seemed to matter a lot. In fact, he never mentioned the importance of the boy's clan, caste or tribe affiliation in the process of deciding whether and when to get in touch with the boy's parents about his plan of initiating a *saki*-relation between the two.

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