

On John Deeney's and Dhanur Singh Purty's Collaboration

[...] Deeney began publishing on the world of the Ho and their language in the mid-seventies after an extended period of extensive research. After hosting an anthropologist in Lupungutu and observing him interview elderly Ho informants while tape-recording their talks Deeney approached Dhanur Singh Purty, a Ho graduate and former student of his. Their collaboration had begun in the early sixties by Dhanur interviewing and tape-recording his own father. Deeney recollects how amazed Dhanur was about his father's memory and knowledge. The recordings plus Dhanur's follow-up research in a number of villages in the heart of Kolhan plus Deeney's own research led to the publication between 1978 and 1982 of a seven-volume encyclopaedia of more than 1000 pages on Ho village life, customs and culture entitled 'The Ho of the Ho Country' (Ho - disum Ho honko). The process of writing up took almost twenty years. D.S. Purty is given as the author, Deeney writes the introduction. The text is written in the Ho language making use of the Devanagari script. Simultaneously Deeney and Dhanur began preparing the Ho-English dictionary containing the denotations in English of all Ho words that appear in the books of the series enriched by detailed ethnographic information (see Reichel 2009: 103 - 108 for the content of the seven volumes). The first edition of the Ho-English dictionary came out in 1978, the same year when the publication of the seven volumes began. Deeney claims that all 12000 entries of the dictionary plus those 900 added in the 2nd edition 2005 have been filtered through Dhanur. I do not know any of Deeney's publications in which he does not emphasize his complete dependence on Dhanur at every stage of their work. Also, when I sometimes got stuck at home while writing up my thesis and I consulted him via email, his answers were always carefully argued and would usually begin by: "I have discussed your mail with Dhanur".

Dhanur also collaborated in the preparation of the "Ho Grammar and Vocabulary" which was published in 1975. Deeney hoped that everybody who is familiar with the Devanagari script will be able to read and understand the seven volumes written by Dhanur by making use of the Ho-English dictionary and the Ho grammar. When the Jesuit language instructors realized that for teaching purposes there should be a faster, more effective and less theoretical approach than that conveyed in the "Ho Grammar and Vocabulary", Deeney wrote a condensed "Introduction to the Ho Language" which was published in 1991. This booklet is a jewel, a survival kit of no more than 50 pages. Although all of the language materials have been accompanying me throughout my fieldwork it was the "Introduction" of which I needed a second copy since my sweaty fingers due to the daily use in tropical climate had eaten up the letters. I still remember the first sentences: I drank rice-beer. She made/built a house. We ate cooked rice. The men sowed the seed. He ploughed the field.

Deeney's latest publication from 2008 is "The Spirit World of the Ho Tribals. And other glimpses into the Ho world." Deeney calls it a book about

the Ho's religious attitudes representing their own perspectives. It is a revised and updated collection of hitherto unpublished essays. This publication written in English draws heavily from the seven volumes written by Dhanur. Deeney had originally considered to translate these volumes into English or to have them translated with Dhanur's help, but they never found the time. Also, Dhanur had fallen victim to moneylenders in the meantime and did only irregularly turn up for work in LPG, as he felt the lives of his wife and his ten children to be threatened in his village. Deeney himself was 87 years now and getting weaker. Before running the risk of the contents of the seven volumes getting lost to many because they are written in Ho and Devanagari, this publication from 2008 then is the condensed result of Deeney's effort to make available in English to others in one book the Ho's relationship towards their deities, their bonga (the body of tutelary and malignant spirits), and their ancestors.

Source: The above text has been taken from *Scholarly Commitment: John Deeney and the Ho of Kolhan*, in: Reichel, Eva 2018, pp. 349-50.