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## The Transformation of Śakti : Gender and Sexuality in the Festival of Goddess Ramachandi

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## Chapter 5

# The Transformation of *Śakti*: Gender and Sexuality in the Festival of Goddess Ramachandi

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### 1. INTRODUCTION: GENDER AND RITUAL IN POST-COLONIAL VILLAGE INDIA

This chapter takes up a festival of a local tutelary goddess, Ramachandi, held at Garh Manitri, an old fort-village (*gara*) in an ex-Khurda kingdom in Orissa.<sup>1)</sup> The ritual performance can be seen as a cultural-political process in which multiple layers of personhood and the identities of the participant individuals, families, castes, local community are constructed and contested.<sup>2)</sup> I would like to discuss the importance of idioms of gender and sexuality in understanding the semantics of the ritual and the cultural-politics of identity involved therein. By semantics, I mean not only the symbolism found in the ritual which no doubt plays an important part in the ritual process, but also the meaning of the ritual performance as a whole in the wider context of a changing political situation in history.

The construction and reproduction of personhood and identities are related at one level to the cosmological symbolism represented in the ritual. It is necessary, therefore, to analyse the symbolism in the ritual and this procedure constitutes the first part of this chapter. Rather than abstracting a static symbolic structure, I will attempt to depict the dynamism born from the interaction between the sets of multiple values and symbols in the enactment of the ritual drama. Of special interest is the process of transformation of divine power or *śakti* which is represented in the festival as the essence of the goddess Ramachandi herself (cf. TANAKA 1989, 1991). Through the ritual drama, *śakti* transforms itself from an ambivalent and dangerous power to a benevolent and protective power and finally comes into symbolic union with royalty. Idioms of gender and sexuality are prominent in the relationship between the goddess and royalty. I would like to illustrate the process of transformation of *śakti*, and show how its representation in the ritual drama may be said to have the ideological function of legitimising the ritual authority of royalty and the related social order.

While this kind of symbolic analysis is certainly necessary for understanding the ritual, it is also necessary to look at how the meaning of the ritual performance has been transformed as the wider socio-political circumstances changed over time.<sup>3)</sup> The second part of this chapter considers the complex cultural-politics over

the significance of the ritual performance in different historical backgrounds, focusing in particular on the new meaning attached to the ritual in colonial and post-colonial history. Attention will be paid to the importance of idioms of sexuality in understanding the semantics of the ritual in the context of complex power relationships. As has been often pointed out, there is a close connection between colonial culture and the imagery of dominance of masculinity over femininity (e.g. NANDY 1983; ALTER 1994). There was a subtle politics of imagery in which "the Orient, as female, was eroticised and then passionately consumed by those in positions of power" (ALTER 1994: 55; also cf. SAID 1979). The hyper-masculine image of the coloniser-rulers together with the "deconstruction of an indigenous male identity" (ALTER 1994: 55) invited complex responses from the Indian people.<sup>4)</sup>

An analysis of the historical background and people's discourse in the village where I conducted fieldwork suggests that there was an anxiety in the colonial period to recover masculinity by performing the goddess festival oriented towards royalty and martial tradition. The meaning of the ritual took a further twist in the post-colonial period, when people aspired to fix and preserve their masculine identity based on their "tradition" in contradistinction to the changes of modern times. Their attempts, however, seem to be seriously and obstinately limited by the frameworks of "colonial memory" (NANDY 1983:73; also cf. BRECKENRIDGE and VAN DER VEER (eds.) 1993).

For the purpose of analysis, in the first part, through an analysis of the ritual symbolism, I deal with the festival in terms of how the transformation of *śakti* in various phases of the ritual brings about the reproduction of the community by recharging generative power and by representing the ritual politico-social order. In the second part, I consider the transformations in the meanings of the ritual performance in the wider context of colonial and post-colonial history. Attention will be paid especially to the imagery of sexuality in the ritual and its relationship to power in a larger context.

Below, I will first give an outline of the region under study and the background of the festival before proceeding to depict the ritual and its interpretation.

## 2. OUTLINE OF THE REGION AND BACKGROUND OF THE FESTIVAL

Fieldwork was conducted in an ex-fort-village called Garh Manitri (Gara Mānatira) in Orissa, Eastern India. Garh Manitri is a fairly large multi-caste village with a population of around 2,500 (480 households) in Khurda sub-division, Puri district, located about 20 km west of Khurda town. About half the population (228 households) are Khandayats (Khaṇḍāyat) or Peasant-Militias who form the dominant caste in the region.

Garh Manitri is divided largely into Upper Fort (*upara gara*) which was the actual fortress in pre-colonial period and where mainly Khandayats with some Scribes (Karaṇa) and Barber (Bhaṇḍāri) castes reside, and Lower Fort (*taḷa gara*)

some distance away where other castes, such as Brahmans, Carpenters (Baḍhei), Oil Pressers (Teli) etc., live (see Figure 1). These two Fort areas are further divided into eight hamlets (*sāhi*) which together are considered to constitute the village proper. The Upper Fort consists of three hamlets, namely Lower Hamlet which is facing the entrance of the fortress, Jaysingh Hamlet where Scribes and Barbers as well as the Khandayats reside, and Upper Hamlet where the residence of the chief and his lineage members is located. The Lower Fort consists of five hamlets, namely, Lower Hamlet which faces the village end (*gā muha*), Carpenter Hamlet, Paika Hamlet (Pāika *sāhi*),<sup>5</sup> Panda Hamlet (Paṇḍā *sāhi*) where mainly Brahmans reside and New Hamlet (*nūā sāhi*) which is a relatively new extension of the village. At the fringes of these two Fort areas, there are hamlets inhabited by Washermen (Dhobā), Sweeper-Drummers (Hāri) and Rock Cutters (Bāuri) belonging to Scheduled Caste categories and Saoras (Saora) who belong to the Scheduled Tribe category.

Historically, Garh Mantri played a role as one of 72 main forts under the Khurda kingdom (1572-1804). The fort-village was the centre of Bārapallī (literally meaning "twelve villages") and 8 smaller villages were placed under the jurisdiction of the fort of Garh Mantri in Khurda Kings' time. The Bārapallī of Garh Mantri was ruled by the "chief" (*daḷabeherā*), assisted by four "sub-chiefs" (*dalei*), one "collector" (*kaudī bhāgiā*) and two "scribes"<sup>6</sup> (*koṭha karaṇa*, *baithi karaṇa*) living in the central fort village, and one accountant (*bhuī mūla*), one village head (*beherā pradhān*) and one village accountant (*bhoi*) living in the surrounding villages. Although these people have lost their original politico-administrative power after colonisation, they still inherit the title and prestige as traditional authorities. They are also given special privileges at the time of the festival of the local tutelary goddess, Ramachandi, in the month of Āświna (September-October).

Ramachandi (Rāmachandī) is the tutelary goddess for the whole Bārapallī area. She resides on a hill north-west of Garh Mantri as a magnificent rock structure more than 20 metres high. The following legend gives an account of her origin.

In the ancient past, Khond tribals lived in this area and the goddess was worshipped by them. One day, Rāma, the hero of the Hindu epic 'Rāmāyaṇa,' came to the goddess during his exile and offered her mother-worship (*matṛ pūjā*). From then on the goddess came to be called Ramachandi.

In accordance with this legend, a Khond priest, *jānī*, performs the everyday worship for Ramachandi. The shaman (*kāḷisī*) of Ramachandi and the animal sacrifice-executor (*hataka*) belong to the Saora tribe. Saoras are thought to have immigrated into the area after the Khonds. Tribal people, Khond and Saora, are said to be the original settlers (*ādibāsī*) of this region and have close relations with the goddess.

Ramachandi plays an important role in the workings of kingship and dominance in the region, since it is thought that it is impossible to rule over the

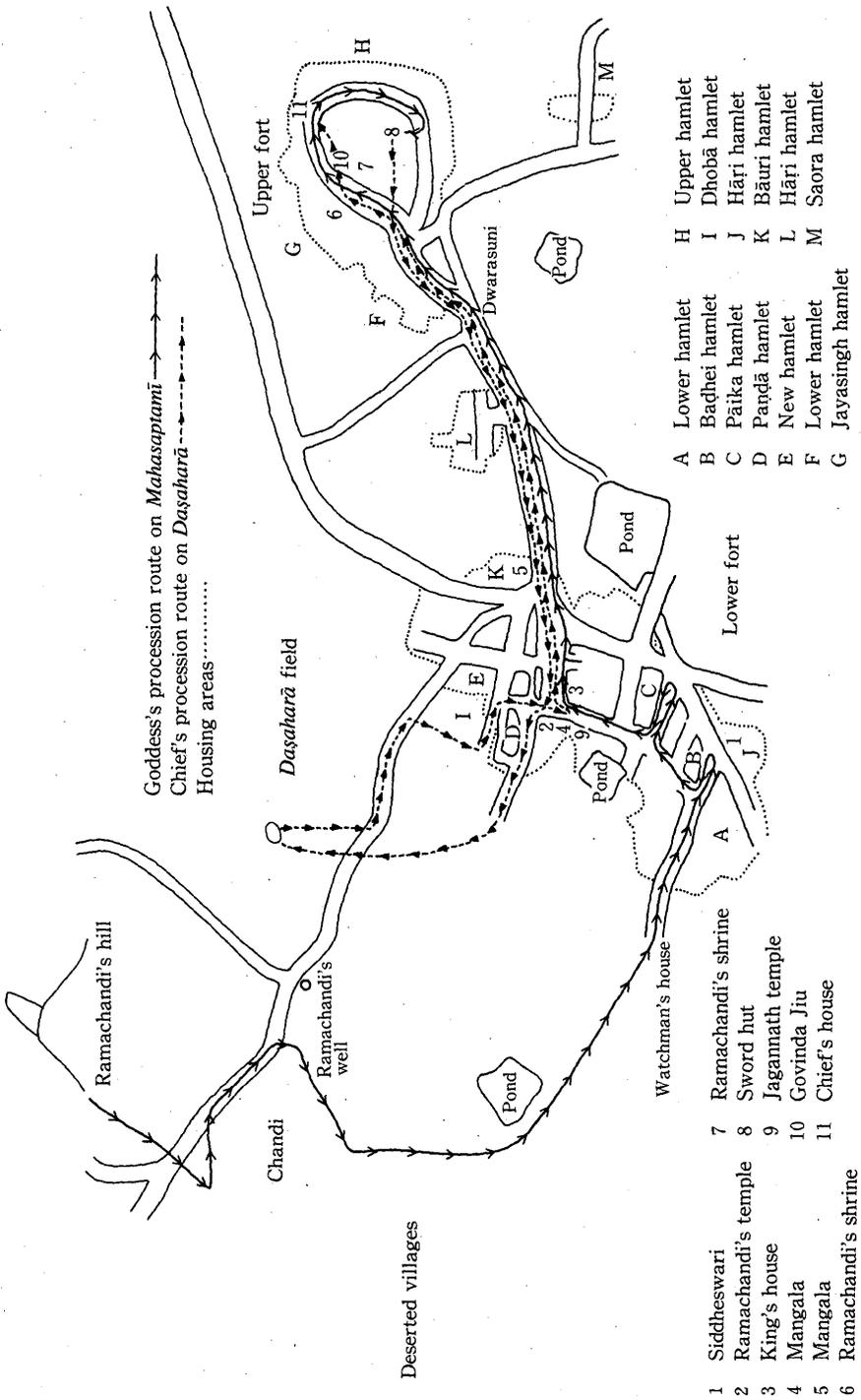


Figure 1. Garh Mantri showing procession routes during Ramachandi festival.

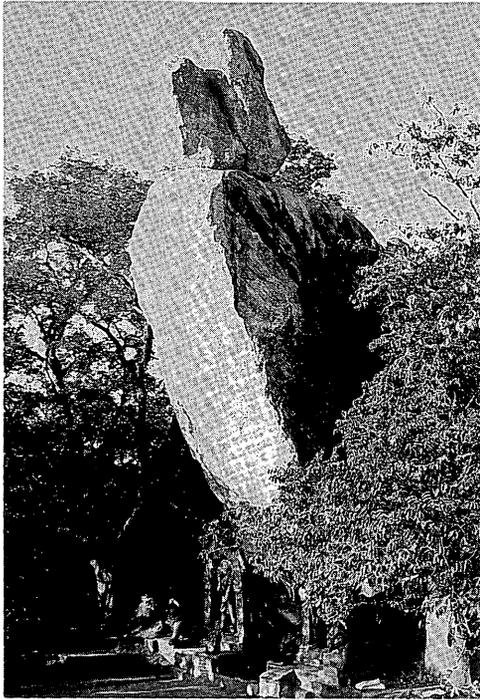
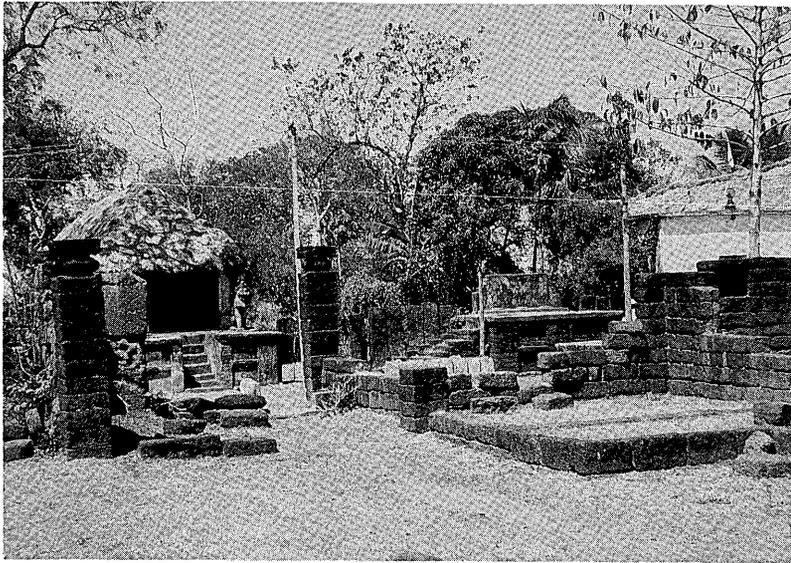


Plate 1. Goddess Ramachandi.

region without the blessings and protection of the local tutelary goddess. This idea is expressed in a legend explaining how the ancestor of the present chief of Garh Manitri was given the right to rule over the region.

The ancestor of the present day chief performed meritorious acts for the Khurda king and the king wished to grant him the position of the chief of the fort. The king promised to arrange a territory for him, but he answered that as a kshatriya he would win over his territory himself through battle. One day in his journey to look for his territory, he came to the hill of Ramachandi and offered her *matṛ pūjā*, at whence the goddess told him that if he was willing to conquer the fort of Garh Manitri situated in her abode, which at that time belonged to the neighbouring kingdom of Ranpur, she would help him. The kshatriya, having obtained permission and recognition from the Khurda king and with the blessings of Ramachandi, succeeded in appropriating the territory. Since then, it is said, Garh Manitri was annexed to the Khurda kingdom and the Hindu kshatriya became the ancestor of the present chief.

It should be noted that the ancestor of the present day chief of Garh Manitri was able to become the ruler of the region not only by being granted permission from the Khurda king but also by means of Ramachandi's help and blessings. This legend shows interesting ideas about the establishment of dominance and order in this region. There is an underlying motif here on the interaction between the indigenous goddess and the ruler coming from outside.



**Plate 2.** A view from within the ruin of the royal court. The Jagannath temple is with the thatched roof on the left and the white Ramachandi temple is on the right.

The process of establishment of Garh Manitri as one of the major forts in the Khurda kingdom was accelerated with the fort's constant connection with the king of Khurda which started soon after the annexation of the region to the kingdom. The king Purushottama Deva (1607–1622) is known to have escaped to Garh Manitri several times under the pressure of the Mughals and to have hidden Jagannath in Garh Manitri (MAHAPATRA 1969: 62; PATNAIK 1979:32). The next king, Narasinha Deva (1622–1647) again secretly brought Puri Jagannath (Jagannāth)'s '*brahma*,' the divine essence of the deity, to Garh Manitri, hid it and built a Jagannath temple there to house it (MAHAPATRA 1969:65). The king also constructed his palace in the village (TRIPATI and KULKE 1987:103), which is now known as the "royal court" (*kacheri*) and stands in ruin, and the Jagannath temple was placed in front of the gate of the palace. Another important move by the royalty regarding the formation of the fort-village was the fact that the king, besides building a Jagannath temple in Garh Manitri, constructed a temple for Ramachandi next to it. So there came to be established a royal-divine complex of the king's palace and temples of the state deity Jagannath and the local tutelary deity Ramachandi in the village of Garh Manitri.

In order for Jagannath and Ramachandi to be worshipped in the proper manner, Brahmans and other service castes were invited to the region. Besides them, the shaman and the sacrifice-executor of the Saora tribe and the Khond priest were also recognised through their roles and position in the community. Also more Khandayats or foot soldiers were invited to the village to support the chief militarily. They were all provided with tax-free land (*debottar*, *brāhmottar*, *jāgir*,

*hetā*) in lieu of their services to the king or to the local community (cf. TANABE forthcoming). Thus the caste system incorporating both indigenous tribal elements and the state level Brahmanic elements was established in Garh Manitri with the king playing the pivotal role as the organiser. The history of the interactions between tribals, warriors, Brahmans and the king, and of the royal order which was subsequently established is richly reflected and represented in the festival of Ramachandi, the process of which I will depict below.

### 3. DESCRIPTION OF THE FESTIVAL

The festival of Ramachandi takes place over 17 days between the 9th day of the dark fortnight of Āświna (September-October) and 10th day of the bright fortnight. The first 16 days correspond to *Durgā Pūjā* which is also called “sixteen *pūjā*” (*ṣoḷa pūjā*) in Orissa, and the 17th with *daśaharā* though in Garh Manitri they are treated as one continuous festival. The period between the first and the 13th day is the preparatory time for welcoming the goddess, the details of which are omitted here. Description is given from the 14th day (see Figure 1).

#### 14th day: *Mahasaptamī*, (The Great Seventh)

**Bathing:** Around 7 o'clock in the evening, the Saora shaman, sacrifice-executor and Khond priest make their way to Ramachandi's hill after purifying their bodies by bathing. According to the shaman, his body after bathing becomes the sacred vessel in which the goddess will reside and hence not even a Brahman is allowed to touch him. This is an interesting statement considering that the shaman is treated as an “untouchable” (*acchūā*) tribal at other times.

**Worship:** The Khond priest begins the series of rituals in front of Ramachandi and first prepares two water-pots (*kaḷaṣa*) which are considered to be vehicles for the goddess's *śakti* besides the shaman. These earthen pots are filled with water from “Ramachandi's well” and positioned in front of the goddess. Then worship (*pūjā*) is performed in which an offering called *puñji* is made, a mixture of rice, milk and egg made into small mounds with a little local liquor poured on top. The word for this offering, *puñji*, seems to be a Khond word. When this first worship is complete, village people who have brought offerings for the goddess have the Khond priest perform worship on their behalf.

**Possession:** The Khond priest takes the black sari offered to the goddess and hands it over to the shaman. The shaman wraps this tightly around his waist and hips. When he finishes putting on the sari, the shaman sits in front of the rock form of the goddess and concentrates. The sound of drum beats grows stronger and people gathered on the hill shout “*Hari bola*”<sup>7)</sup> in unison several times. The Khond priest takes some red paste from the rock form of the goddess and smears it on the shaman's forehead, and similarly takes the garland from the goddess and puts it on the shaman. This ritual action may be said to symbolise the identification of the goddess and the shaman. The shaman's eyes become bloodshot, his body

begins to shake and he jumps up, possessed by the goddess. The shaman, now the goddess herself, runs to the front and devours the *puñji* offering without using the hands. The Khond priest then offers liquor, lamp and light to the shaman. Next, the shaman is given an umbrella made of flowers and he dances amidst the people shouting *Hari bola* to an unceasing drum beat. The people are full of joy and excitement.

**Communication with the devotees and the first cock sacrifice:** When the dance comes to an end, the shaman goes around listening to the devotees' problems and wishes. There are many devotees waiting prostrated on the hill to have their voices heard by the goddess. In cases where there are devotees who have stayed (*guhāri, dhāraṇa*) on the hill of Ramachandi for many days praying to the goddess and taking only the remains of food offered to her (*prasād, bhoga*), these are called first by the shaman and given answers or blessings. Then comes the turn of the rest of the devotees. While this is going on, a cock is sacrificed by the sacrificer attended by only the Khond priest, Khond attendants carrying the water-pots, the Barber and the sweeper-drummers. Others are not allowed to see this sacrifice as it is considered very dangerous. The cock is provided by the sweeper-drummer caste in the Lower Fort area. When the devotees on the hill finish praying, the shaman, Khond priest, Khond attendant carrying the water pots, sacrifice-executor, and sweeper-drummers proceed down the hill with the Barber holding a torch at the



Plate 3. The shaman/goddess communicating with the devotees.

head of the group.

**Placating *chaṇḍī*, *preta* and *bhūta* in the deserted village:** The first destination after leaving the hill is the deserted village area. Here Ramachandi's *prasād* is offered to *chaṇḍī* (goddesses which have strong ambivalent power), *preta* (spirits of the dead) and *bhūta* (evil spirits) in four places. The Khond priest makes the offerings to the *chaṇḍī*, *preta* and *bhūta* and no one else but the shaman, sacrifice-executor and sweeper-drummers are supposed to be present. Offering Ramachandi's *prasād* may be said to placate the *chaṇḍī*, *preta* and *bhūta* and at the same time bring them under Ramachandi's control, since taking *prasād* means accepting Ramachandi's superiority. The deserted village is said to have been once inhabited by Khonds.

**Entry into the village and march in the Lower Fort:** The procession led by the shaman passes through the deserted village area and enters the village from the Lower Hamlet of Garh Manitri's Lower Fort, which is considered the lowest end of the village. At the village border, there is a house of the watchman (*chhātīā*) and a cock is sacrificed there. The procession moves to the upper part of the village from the lower end. The final destination is the "sword hut" built in the Upper Hamlet of Upper Fort where the chiefly lineage resides. The shaman and the water-pots are worshipped in houses on the procession route. The head of the household (*karitā*) performs the rituals for the shaman and the Khond priest for the water-pots. The families of the shaman and the sacrifice-executor collect the offerings presented by the houses and these are distributed afterwards between them. The houses *en route* between the entrance of the village up to the royal court are only allowed to present dry offerings (*sukhilā bhoga*). That is to say, raw or fried items are allowed but not those boiled in water. Cocks offered by individuals are sacrificed in front of a shrine dedicated to the goddess Siddheswari (*Siddheswari*), who is said to be Ramachandi's younger sister.

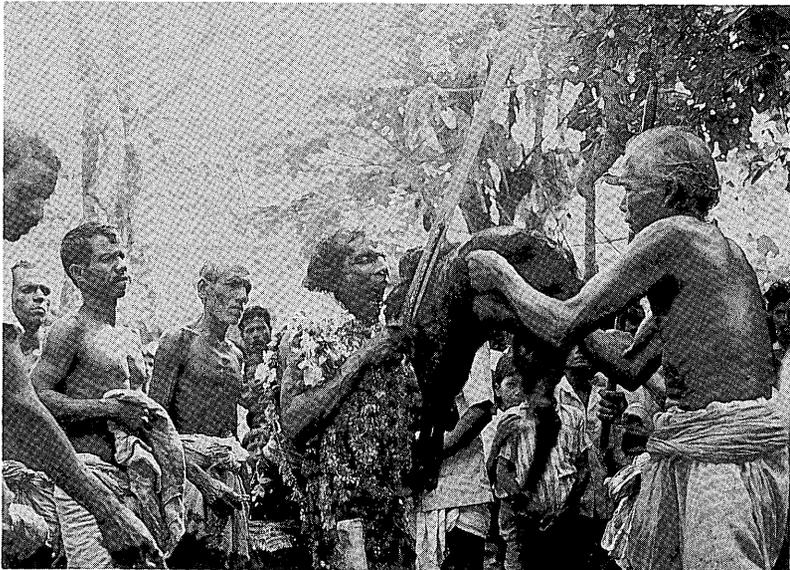
**Performance of sword lifting:** When the procession arrives at Ramachandi's temple located in front of the royal court, the shaman and the Khond priest go inside and close the doors behind them. The chief lays the "king's sword" on the ground in front of the temple. The sword symbolises the king endowing the chief with authority as the legitimate ruler in the fort. There is a legend behind the ritual act of laying this sword in front of the shaman. In the olden days, the chief did not believe in the divinity of the shaman and tested him by challenging him to lift up a 12 foot sword. The shaman not only lifted up the sword with ease but also started swinging it. The chief had to submit himself before the shaman and admit the authenticity of the possession of the shaman by the goddess.

In this part of the festival, this legend is enacted. The shaman and the Khond priest leave the flower umbrella inside the temple and come outside. The Barber holds the torch, bends down and leads the shaman. They walk slowly around the sword anticlockwise. The shaman swings his body and head looking to the heavens occasionally, the villagers explain that he is waiting to receive the goddess's even greater power. Having gone around three times the shaman bends down, lifts the

sword up high, stands up and begins to dance. In a dramatic moment, the sound of drums grow louder and the excited villagers shout *Hari bola* several times.

**King's offerings:** The shaman goes towards the remains of the royal court holding the sword. The people are now convinced of the goddess's power possessing the shaman and the offerings are made at the royal court. Today a villager who used to be an officer at that court makes the offerings but what is important is the fact that the offerings are made in the king's name even today. Here the Khond priest worships the shaman and the water-pots, and the goddess accepts the cooked offerings (*sankuḍi bhoga*) for the first time. After this, houses along the procession route are allowed to make offerings of cooked food, except those of the "untouchable" caste. This is in contrast to the fact that up to that moment only dry offerings were permitted regardless of the devotee's caste.

**Animal sacrifices:** After this, animal sacrifices are offered on behalf of individuals in front of a small shrine dedicated to goddess Mangala next to the temple of Ramachandi. Here sheep and goats are sacrificed for the first time. As cooked offerings were made for the first time at the royal court and then permitted in other places from then on, sheep and goats are allowed to be offered after this. It might be said that elements of great tradition in Hinduism found in this festival increase with the addition of cooked offerings and sacrifice of goats and sheep. When the head of a sacrificial animal is cut off by the sacrifice-executor, the shaman drinks blood that runs from its body. The head of the first animal sacrificed is supposed to be offered to the king next morning. In actual fact, it is taken to the



**Plate 4.** The shaman/goddess takes the blood of the sacrificial animal holding the king's sword. The Khond priest is holding the body of the animal.

Jagannath temple office in a nearby town, but again what is important is that it is still addressed to the king. The king of Puri today is the chairman of the Jagannath temple committee.

**Procession to the Upper Fort:** The procession headed by the shaman leaves the Lower Fort area and proceeds to the Upper Fort area, where a fortress actually existed during the king's time. When the procession reaches the entrance of the fortress, a sacrifice is performed in front of the shrine dedicated to the goddess Duarasuni (Duārasuṇī) who is said to guard the entrance of the fortress. Duarasuni is also said to be a younger sister of Ramachandi. The first cock to be sacrificed there is offered by the sweeper-drummer caste hamlet near the Upper Fort area and sacrifices on behalf of individuals follow. In the Upper Fort area too, the shaman and the water-pots are worshipped at houses along the route. It is interesting to see that the peasant-militia Khandayat caste, who usually act so proudly and in a superior manner in everyday circumstances, worship the shaman whose body is that of an "untouchable" tribal.

**Sword play:** The shaman performs the sword play (*khaṇḍā khela*) in front of the scribe's (Koṭha Karaṇa) house, where there is also a shrine dedicated to Ramachandi. First, the scribe spreads a piece of cloth made of two red saris joined together in the open space in front of his house. The shaman goes slowly around the sari anticlockwise led by the Barber amidst the increasing excitement of the crowd. When he goes around for the third time he rolls onto the sari as if to lie down on it and dances swinging the sword. The procession then moves to the



**Plate 5.** The shaman/goddess (standing in the middle) and the two water pots (held by two men sitting on the left) accepting offerings from a Khandayat's household. The Khond priest (sitting in the middle) is performing the puja.

Upper Hamlet where the chiefly lineage reside and accept worship. It is noteworthy that the chief himself worships the shaman who holds the king's sword. The last sacrifice on behalf of individuals is performed in front of the shrine dedicated to Ramachandi in that hamlet.

**The royal sacrifice:** The procession finally reaches the "sword hut" (*khaṇḍā*



**Plate 6.** Sword play.



**Plate 7.** A Brahman priest chanting *mantra* to the sacrificial goat for the royal sacrifice.

ghara) constructed near the chief's residence. A Brahman priest throws rice and flowers on the shaman, chanting a *mantra*. Then the shaman places the sword in the hut. The Brahman then performs a series of rituals to sanctify the sacrificial goat. This is the first role for a Brahman in this festival. Then the sacrifice of the



**Plate 8.** The shaman falls down after accepting the royal sacrifice. At the back is the sword hut.



**Plate 9.** Distribution of the sacrificial meat.

goat called the “royal sacrifice” (*sarakārī baḷi*) takes place. Just after the goat is sacrificed the shaman drinks its blood and falls down which results in the goddess leaving his body. From then on, the goddess is said to reside in the sword. The goat is later cut up and distributed among the villagers according to certain rules. The chief is given the penis and testicles in which the *śakti* is said to be concentrated and the Brahman who performed the role of the priest gets the goat’s head, etc. All people who had a certain duty in the ritual have a share of the meat of the sacrificed animal.

**15th day: Mahāṣṭamī, (The Great Eighth)**

**Worship of the goddess in the form of the sword:** In the morning and evening from this day to the last day of the festival, the sword and water-pots representing the goddess are worshipped in the sword hut with the Brahman acting as priest and the chief as the worshipper (*karttā*). Iron pens and palm leaf scripts collected from the traditional royal authorities of the region such as chief, collector, accountant etc. and from the ex-*sarbarākāra* (tax-collectors from colonial time) who are also patrons of the festival, are placed next to the king’s sword and worshipped. These were used as writing instruments in the days of the king and were indispensable for administration. Contributing these items to the sword hut is thought to be an honour and prestige for those who are considered to have “traditional” authority in the region.

**Mahāṣṭamī sacrifice:** The *mahāṣṭamī* sacrifice is performed at midnight when *chandī*, *preta* and *bhūta* are said to wander about. First the priest (*pūjāri*) cooks



**Plate 10.** The chief (front) and the Brahman priest (back) performing *pūjā* to the king’s sword, the medium of Goddess Ramachandi’s *śakti*.

the offerings and the Brahman offers a fire sacrifice (*homa*). When this is over, the Brahman sanctifies the sheep which is then sacrificed. This sacrificial animal, like the one in the royal sacrifice, is said to have been given by the king in the past and today it is bought with part of the contribution given by the Jagannath temple office. The Khond priest picks up the head of the animal and places it on a pot. The Brahman takes this into the sword hut, offers it to Ramachandi together with the cooked food and performs worship. He then dips a piece of *kuśa* grass in the blood collected in the pot and scatters the blood over the food. The cooked offering and the meat of the sacrificed animal is distributed to villagers later on according to a fixed system of rules. On the sixteenth day, worship is performed in the usual way in the sword hut.

### The final 17th day: *Daśaharā*

**Worship of tools of profession:** Two days later on *daśaharā* day, the tools of profession (*saja*) are laid out and worshipped in each household. *Daśaharā* day is said to be a day to start new work and hence tools of profession are worshipped. For instance, in houses of the Peasant-Militia caste, swords and agricultural tools are worshipped and in houses of Barber castes scissors and comb. From the *daśaharā* day and for a few days after, services to the patron caste begin (*daśaharā bheti*). This involves Brahmans and other service castes visiting the houses of the peasant militia caste patrons and beginning their work (*anukūla*).

***Daśaharā* procession:** In the evening, with the sound of the sweepers drumming, the Barber comes with a torch to call first the scribe (*koṭha karaṇa*) and then the chief in their houses and take them to the sword hut. The final worship is performed by the Brahman and chief in the sword hut. Then amidst the sound of drums the chief lifts up the sword and leads a procession of Khond priest, Brahman, scribe, Barber with the torch and sweeper-drummers. As they proceed, men of the Peasant-Militia caste and patrons of the festival (*ex-sarbarākāra*) join them when the procession passes in front of their houses on route. Auspicious water-pots and lamps are placed in front of each house and women sound the *hula huli*. This is a procession to take Ramachandi back to her abode and at the same time a pseudo-military march. On the way, warriors demonstrate war dances or martial arts.

The procession leaves the Lower Fort area and reaches the *daśaharā* field. This is an area in the middle of cultivated field. First the Brahman priest performs a ritual. Then the chief, followed by others, write "We seek protection at the feet of auspicious Ramachandi" (*Śrī Śrī Śrī Rāmachandī charaṇe śaraṇa*) three times on a piece of palm leaf with an iron pen and tear and throw the leaf away. By doing this it is said that any work begun on *daśaharā* day will be successful. Everyone except the Khond priest then leaves the spot. The Khond priest performs worship to the water-pots before throwing them into the pond. This is a secret ritual and no one else is allowed to see it.

The chief and the rest of the procession go to the Jagannath temple where they

are given water and leaves of a holy plant (*tuḷṣī pāṇī*) by the *pūjāri* serving at the temple who is in turn given some money (*dakṣiṇā*). The chief receives the *tuḷṣī pāṇī* first and then the others. When it is the chief's turn the Brahman holds the sword. The procession then moves back to the Upper Hamlet of the Upper Fort area and goes to the temple of the tutelary deity of the chiefly lineage, Govinda Jiu (Gobinda Jīu). Here also they receive *tuḷṣī pāṇī*. When they reach the chief's house, the chief is greeted with a ritual of respect and welcome performed by the Barber (*baṇḍāpanā*). Then the Brahman performs rituals on the sword, returns it to its case and hangs it up in the sword room in the chief's house. The sword is not brought out again until the following year. Those who took part in the procession are welcomed back to their houses by the sounds of women's *hula huli* and this marks the end of the festival.

#### 4. INTERPRETATION OF THE FESTIVAL AND IDIOMS OF GENDER

Interpretation of the festival of Ramachandi shows that there are multiple perspectives in the rituals each of which come to the fore at different stages in the course of the festival. These multiple perspectives indicate the kind of social relations prevalent at the particular scene of the ritual. What is of interest here is that social relations are expressed in the idiom of gender in the ritual, as the goddess, who is feminine, comes into contact with the king who can be said to represent the masculine. A notable feature in the festival of Ramachandi is the relationship between the transformation of the goddess and the process of establishment of the royal order in the region. The festival of Ramachandi may be interpreted as a process by which the goddess is invited into the community and her generative power directed and controlled to become a protective force for the reproduction of the community.

If we look closely at the actual ritual process, the festival may be said to show a revolving cycle of transformation of *śakti* and regeneration in the following sequence: a) manifestation of the primordial power of the goddess; b) union of the goddess and the king mediated by the Brahman and re-establishment of the community; c) consumption of the product of the union and attack directed outside. Each of these stages show a different kind of social relation expressed through the idiom of gender.

##### a) Manifestation of the primordial power of the goddess

The power represented by the goddess is thought to be the source of production and fertility. The villagers call this power "primordial power" (*ādi śakti*) and the mother of all. The goddess and her power enter the village mediated by the Khond priest and Saora shaman who are in close relationship with the goddess. Only the indigenous people can mediate the extremely strong and dangerous power of the goddess initially. The Khond priest and Saora shaman are totally devoted to the goddess and do not attempt to control the goddess's power but accept her as

absolute. Possession of the shaman by the goddess can be seen as absolute surrender and self-sacrifice by the shaman as he provides the goddess with his body. Women and lower caste people may also come to the hill to plead to the goddess as there are no gender or caste distinctions barring them. There are no social relations as such since the only relation that matters is the one between the devotee and the goddess.

Possession is the concrete manifestation of the goddess's power and the first part of the process of her transformation. The goddess who stands in the form of a rock gains speech and mobility by taking the form of a living shaman and directly answers the devotees' questions, blesses them and moves around to other places. Placating *chaṇḍī*, *preta* and *bhūta* wandering in the deserted village area is the next step of transformation for the *śakti*. *Chaṇḍī*, *preta* and *bhūta* may be said to represent destructive aspects of Ramachandi and appeasing them is part of the process of removing the dangerous aspect of the power before the procession enters the village. The entry of the goddess, who originally belongs to the forest, into the village leads to the dissolving of borders and order, since the basic division that demarcates the village from the forest collapses here. At this stage in the festival, people are related with the goddess on a one-to-one basis through their faith and devotion (*bhakti*). All are equal in front of the goddess and hierarchical relations between people lose their meaning.

Even the chief, who represents the king in the locality, is cast as an equal among people. He is stripped of his power and authority as the goddess takes away the king's sword from him in front of her temple in the village. This may be interpreted as symbolic emasculation and the chief is dominated by the feminine power of the goddess. The king too accepts the shaman/goddess's power and presents offerings at the royal court. The king, chief, dominant caste, and other members of the community pay absolute homage to the goddess and the goddess grants the community fertility and blessing, as only absolute servitude is awarded with blessing. In this way king, chief and other villagers accept the sacredness and power of the shaman/goddess. The idiom of gender here suggests that the generative power of femininity triumphs in this part of the festival.

**b) Union of the king and the goddess mediated by the Brahman and the re-establishment of the community**

In the same process, however, we also find evidence that the goddess herself is gradually adopting Hindu civilisation and coming closer to the realm of the king. For instance, the goddess comes to accept different kinds of offerings. On the hill in the forest, the offerings were raw rice, eggs and liquor; but when the procession enters the village, sweets and fruits are offered; and reaching the royal court, the offerings become cooked food. Moreover, it should be pointed out that when the procession enters the village and the shaman begins to accept offerings from houses, it is the male head of household (*karitā*) who performs the worship on behalf of the individuals in his household. Women of the house cook the offerings but are not to

go out on to the street, and must wait inside the house for the shaman to come to them. Here we can see the appearance of household, rather than individual devotees, as the unit of worship, and the beginnings of gender distinctions in the roles thereof.

The idiom of sexuality is found in the ritual in which the goddess rolls down on the red sari in front of the scribe's house. This may be interpreted as the goddess accepting the king's offerings and it may also be said to have sexual overtones. The villagers' explanation is simply that the goddess lies down on the sari because she is happy, but a red sari is worn by the bride in a wedding and "to lie" (*soibā*) is a colloquial term for having sexual intercourse. This part of ritual can be said to indicate the goddess's sexual contact with the king and she is said to be pleased by the king entertaining her with superior offerings and the red silk sari. This contact between the king and the goddess leads to their union in the royal sacrifice.

The royal sacrifice can be interpreted as self-sacrifice and absolute surrender of the community and at the same time symbolic of the union between the goddess and the king. Up till this time emphasis was placed on the bestowal of the goddess's blessings and protection granted by devotion and subservience shown towards her. The important thing there was the direct relationship with the goddess and from another point of view, it can be said that there was a lack of order governing social relationships. The royal sacrifice, on the one hand, may be said to be the culmination of the process of enacting subordination to the goddess since the whole community including the king offers sacrifice. On the other hand, however, it is a great turning point in the formation of social order and re-establishment of the community, since the king's presence appears prominent as the representative of the community and the king unites with the goddess, concentrating her power in his presence. This process is made possible by the mediation of the Brahman priest.

The royal sacrifice differs from previous sacrifices offered in that the subject of the offering is not the individual or household but the whole community represented by the king and that the sacrificial animal is sanctified by the Brahman. The Brahman's *mantra* which represents the ordering principle succeeds in separating the king's sword from the body of the living shaman as the shaman puts down the sword in the sword hut, and then the power of the goddess entirely leaves the body of the shaman as he collapses after accepting the royal sacrifice. Thus the goddess's power is transferred from the body of the shaman into the sword which may be controlled as the medium of divinity, unlike the uncontrollable and unpredictable shaman. That is to say, with the help of the Brahman who holds transcendental authority, the king and his representative chief become the agents who receive and utilise the indigenous power of generation. This may be said to be possible due to the Brahman's "purity," that is to say, his qualification or right to perform certain actions (cf. INDEN 1985:34). The more right one has, the higher his purity. The purity of the Brahman confers on him high position in the caste hierarchy ranking, which is represented in this part of the ritual. By the intervention and manipulation of the Brahman, the indigenous power of fertility hitherto carried

into the village by the medium of the Saora shaman and the Khond priest is transferred to a sword which can be worshipped in a temple (sword hut) in a Brahmanic manner. At the same time, the indigenous tribal people are transformed from the mediator of the goddess's power having a privileged position into peripheral, impure beings, as the caste hierarchy based on the principle of distinction between the pure and impure is established. It is noteworthy that the benevolent and protective power, thus controlled by the intervention of the Brahman priest, is put into effect not by the Brahman himself but by the king and the chief who represents the king.

### c) Consumption of the product of the union

The king's sword symbolises or embodies the union between the king and the goddess. Here the indigenous power unites with the conqueror-rulers. Through this union, the power of generation of the goddess bears fruit and the society is endowed with well-being through procreation of the people, abundant crops and military success. The dominating king, with the help of the Brahman, is able to become the centre of power as he is the one who is fit to unite with the power of all production and to administer this power. Hence he becomes the leader of the community in the system of division of labour. This system of kingship is based on values of honour and duty and has the generation of auspiciousness and well-being as its aim. In the *daśaharā* procession, the chief as the king's representative leads the way and the Brahman priest plays an assisting role. Here, the system of division of labour centred around the chief is represented.

This may be seen in the distribution of the meat of the sacrificial animal in the royal sacrifice. The sacrificial process brings about a union between the king and the goddess and the moment the animal is sacrificed it is treated as the product of the union and transformed into an object to be distributed and consumed in the name of order brought about by the king. The meat of the animal is externalised as object of consumption by the community centring around the chief who represents the king.

The motif of consumption is further seen in the sacrifice in *mahāṣṭamī*. What is interesting here is that the sacrificial animal in this case may be said to be also associated with the tribals. *Chañḍī*, *preta* and *bhūta*, which live in the forests said to be the habitat of the tribals, wander around at the site of the sacrifice. While the chief and the Brahman perform a *homa* ritual inside the sword hut, the tribals are not allowed to go inside due to their impurity. Here we can see clearly the structural opposition between the presence of the Brahman and the chief in the pure bright area inside the hut and the presence of tribals, *chañḍī*, and the sacrificial animal outside in the dark. This may be seen to be related to the village/forest dichotomy in the Hindu world view. The sacrificial animal which symbolises the aspect of evil and the external in this world, is allowed to enter the sword hut when it is sacrificed and even then only the head is offered inside. Its body is cut up and consumed by the community according to the order specified by the king. It is

notable that tribals are not included in the distribution of the meat from the *mahāṣṭamī* sacrifice.

In the march on *daśaharā* day, the consumption motif takes the form of attack directed to the outside. This procession is headed by the chief who holds the sword symbolising the controlled power of goddess Ramachandi followed by other traditional royal office holders. In the demonstration of this power even the Brahman priest is obliged to stand behind the rulers. Performance of martial arts is a demonstration of violence that has gained legitimacy. They head for the conquest of the imaginary outer. At the *daśaharā* field, the water-pots which are said to be another medium of the goddess are thrown into the pond in the paddy fields. The water in the pot from "Ramachandi's well" thus returns to the fields, the site of production, having been saturated with the power of fertility of the goddess. This water is believed to bring a good harvest to the twelve villages in the Garh Manitri area.

On *daśaharā* day all castes in the village begin their work. They worship the tools of their profession in the morning, and having then reflected upon their duty and role, visit their dominant caste patrons according to the division of labour set by royal community order and begin their service. Rice is harvested just over a month after this festival and is collected by the land owning dominant caste and other high castes before it is redistributed through service and exchange. This shows a part of the mechanism of dominance involving centralisation and redistribution of products.

So far, I have tried to show that there is a transformation of *śakti* in the course of the ritual process, whereby the goddess enters the village as a potentially dangerous being demanding the villagers' full submission, but is finally led to granting her benevolent protective and generative power, after finding a suitable partner for union in the person of the king. In terms of idioms of gender, the transformation can be described as the process in which the feminine power, that reigns supreme in the first phase, gets united with the masculine in the second phase, to give the fruits of the union in forms of crops and fertility and the power of violence for their acquirement, distribution and consumption by the community dominated by the royal-Brahmanic masculine order. The *śakti* of the goddess in the end becomes the power of the king, who holds possession and control over it. The union of the royal authority and the goddess's power is represented in the sword conferred to the chief and recharged with the divine power, which is called the "royal sword" but also worshipped as "Ramachandi's sword." The local chief as the representative of the king in the region is given the right to hold the sword after he has submitted himself to the power of the goddess and the authority of the king. Here, the local politico-social order sanctioned by both the local tutelary goddess and the superior royalty is reproduced with the chief as the representative of the higher power and authority.

Now from the viewpoint of the socio-political order, the *śakti* of the goddess can be said to have rendered itself to the union with royalty for the reproduction of

the community. While this kind of analysis, I believe, is relevant for understanding the mechanism of the reproduction of people's identities based on the royal social order, it may be questioned whether this kind of interpretation is not biased towards an order from the male point of view. The question comes to mind whether the *śakti* of the goddess can be said to be fully encompassed under the royal control. There seem to be two aspects which should be born in mind here.

First, the encompassment of the goddess's *śakti* by the royal social order represents only one phase in the process of transformation of the *śakti*, and if we take the process as a whole, it is impossible to determine whether the *śakti* or the royalty is more encompassing. In the first phase ("a" in the above analysis), *śakti* encompasses all, annihilating the social order; in the second ("b"), the union is achieved on an equal footing as far as *śakti* and royalty are concerned, although the tribals must succumb to the caste hierarchy; and it is only in the third phase ("c") that the royalty seems to have control over and encompasses (part of) the *śakti*. Thus the encompassing agent changes according to context in the process.

Second, attention should be drawn to the fact that the *śakti* of the goddess, in the last instance, is not totally united with nor fully encompassed by the royal male principle. Although it is true, as I attempted to show above, that the goddess allows part of her *śakti* to reside in the royal sword, the goddess herself in the forest on the hill remains forever free of control. Only some part of the *śakti* of the goddess is believed to be contained in the sword. In this sense, the goddess is not wholly encompassed or subsumed under a dominating male principle even in the third final phase. There are some "residual" elements of *śakti* which escape total encompassment.<sup>8)</sup> The goddess is able to support the polity-society with only some part of her divine power, which she bestows upon the people by her grace. In this connection, we may also remind ourselves that the ruler must have sanction from the goddess to successfully reign over the region. The ruler thought unfit by the goddess would lose her protection and be replaced by another, as the oral history discussed in Section 2 indicates.

Thus, although it is true from the point of view which puts emphasis on the socio-political order, that at least some *śakti* is controlled and utilised by the male dominant polity-society, it is also possible from other points of view to argue that it is the village society including its royal order which is dependent on and encompassed by the goddess's life-giving power. We can find shifting viewpoints here whereby there is no determining whether *śakti* or royalty is more encompassing. *Śakti* transforms itself elusively, sometimes showing its independent all-encompassing character and sometimes allowing itself to be in union with the male principle for the regeneration of society.<sup>9)</sup>

This being said, however, we should also note the special position given to the "traditional" rulers in the ritual. It is undeniable that the position and role of the rulers with whom the *śakti* unites are legitimised and elaborately represented at the end of the ritual. It is notable too that in the discourses of the villagers today the emphasis is often put on the glory of the king and the goddess and how the ritual is

performed according to the norm set from the king's time.

Another question we must ask here then is why this kind of "royal" social order is performed and discussed in such a grand manner in an obscure village in today's India, where royalty has lost its grandeur not to mention political power. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider the historicity of this ritual during the colonial and post-colonial times and see the transformations of its semantics in the context of changing power relations and imagery of sexuality. For this we must next take a look at the background history of the region.

## 5. POWER, SEXUALITY AND RITUAL IN THE COLONIAL ERA

The whole of the former kingdom of Khurda was confiscated by the British after an attempted revolt by the Khurda king in 1804. Later, the Khurda king was called to Puri as the superintendent of the Jagannath Temple. The king was made a head of a religious organisation, the Jagannath Temple, whose main task was to supervise religious and ritual matters. Here we can see the beginnings of the division of politics and religion into the respective spheres of state and society in the colonial era, whereas in the king's time, politics and religion were intimately connected at all levels of the kingdom. The British, in accordance with their "liberal" ideology as well as practical considerations, decided to leave the sphere of society, which included such phenomena as religion, ritual, depoliticised kingship and caste, in the hands of the "natives."

From the point of view of the imagery of sexuality and the notion of power that was imported from Britain and which influenced Indian perspectives, it might be said that the conquered king was stripped of his masculine political power and given a ritual power which was emasculated or femininised. In such a situation, it was the utmost concern of the people of Khurda, especially the Khandayats and Scribes who had enjoyed close relationships with the king, often occupying prestigious royal offices such as chiefs and accountants, not to speak of the king himself, to recover from the "wounded masculinity" (VISWESWARAN 1990: 68) by resurrecting "the ideology of martial races latent in the traditional Indian concept of statecraft" (NANDY 1983: 7).

This colonial memory of humiliated masculinity lingers on still as one hears, for instance, Khandayats in the region saying:

We are called Khandayats since we are the holders of *khaṇḍās* (swords). Without *khaṇḍās*, we will no more be Khandayats. You have seen that we place our *khaṇḍās* as tools of our profession (*saja*) and worship (*pūjā*) them on *daśaharā* day. It is because we are Khandayats. But you know what happened? This is what I have heard. During the time of the British, they were so afraid of us that they came and confiscated some of our *khaṇḍās*. Of course, our ancestors kept most of them in secret and we still have them, but those whose *khaṇḍās* were taken away, they cried and cried because they had lost their *khaṇḍās*. Do you understand? And moreover, the British ordered that we were not allowed to take out in public a knife longer than one span (*gotīe chākhaṇḍa*; the length between the tip of the middle finger to the

bottom of the palm). That's only this long (showing his hand). They were so afraid of us that they did not want us to carry even a small knife! If they had seen us with our *khaṇḍā*, they would have run away (Laugh).

Here we can observe the complexity of the response towards the colonial power. The swords of the Khandayats were taken away and they were prohibited from carrying even a knife. They were, in effect, deprived of the symbol of their masculinity and martial identity and it seems that they carry the stigma of their emasculation till today. It is obvious who the real power holders were. The colonisers had the power to convey orders upon them. However, the colonised try to laugh at the cowardice of the colonisers, implying that they themselves have always been the truly courageous ones with manly qualities. As a means of resistance, the colonised tried their best to prove their "real" masculine identity, albeit restricted, which was possible only in the limited "non-political," ritual domain but which nonetheless was true to their own "tradition."

Thus it must have been a good opportunity for the king and his people to secure the protected domain for masculine tradition when the king was offered Ekharājāt Māhāl as his estate. Hitherto, the expenses for the management of the temple were paid by the British government. When criticism against managing the so-called "idol worship" heightened in Britain, however, the British government decided to cut off all the relations with the temple, and in 1858 and 1867, the British government handed over the right of tax collection in a certain area of the ex-Khurda kingdom, called Ekharājāt Māhāl, in lieu of the expenses of the management of the temple. Garh Manitri was included in the Māhāl and one of the tax collector's offices (sub-tahasildar's office) was placed there.

It is no wonder then that in the Ekharājāt Māhāl, the newly created "royal territory," royal and martial traditions of masculinity were strengthened and performed in grandeur, though admittedly not in a "real" political or martial sense. The festival of Ramachandi in Garh Manitri was one such performance where they could satisfy, albeit "ritually," their thirst and anxiety for masculinity.

Although the festival was decontextualised from the pre-colonial political structure of kingship, it was re-contextualised in the system of colonial royalty. The festival of the goddess Ramachandi seems to have flourished in the area as it was patronised by the king and the local tax-collectors called *sarbarākāra* under the Ekharājāt Māhāl office. It was funded by the king's tax office, *kacherī* (or katchery in Anglicised spelling), and the tax collectors who were usually recruited from the people of the area. The position of the *sarbarākāra* was not only prestigious but also economically beneficial as they were given free tax land or *jāgiri* plus 15 to 20 % of the collected tax as salary. They formed a class of new rich in the locality having considerable influence. It is notable that the newly appointed *sarbarākāras*, together with the old royal officers such as the chief, sub-chiefs, accountants and scribes, have the privilege of placing their iron pens and palm leaves, their symbol of authority as a literate managerial class, beside the royal sword in the sword hut.

They also receive a certain portion of the remains of offerings and sacrifices and are allowed to take part in the *daṣaharā* procession together with the chief and militia. The Ramachandi festival thus became an occasion to represent the system of royal honour and privileges in the villages of Ekharājāt Māhāl restructured during the colonial period.

It is interesting and ironical that the festival flourished because of the colonial hand which had made the region into the Ekharājāt Māhāl, born out of the colonial division between "modern politics of state" and "traditional religion of society." The Ekharājāt Māhāl was, so to say, established in order to sustain a purely "religious" tradition that was devoid of politics. However, as I repeatedly emphasise, the performance of the ritual was a part of their cultural-political endeavour to re-establish their lost masculine identity. It is necessary to see both the colonial hand and the agency of the colonised in order to understand the semantics of the ritual in the larger context. The festival of Ramachandi with its sexual idioms, as described above, reconfirmed the "masculine tradition" required in colonial times where the royal and martial order of the fort-village is represented. The old authorities such as the chief, sub-chiefs, accountants and scribes, and the new colonial authorities, the *sarbarākāras*, as well as the dominant caste of the region, the Khandayats are identified in the end as the masculine and violent consumers of the fruits of union in the para-military procession on *daṣaharā* day.

It is interesting to note that along with such emphasis on the royal, masculine aspect of the ritual during the colonial era, there was a semantic shift in the meaning of *śakti* and the mother aspect of the goddess. It is perhaps necessary first to look at the earlier medieval development of the Ramachandi cult in order to better understand the changes in the colonial era. As I explained in Section 3, Ramachandi was originally worshipped by the indigenous Khonds as an Earth Goddess before she came to be incorporated into the Hindu systems of worship with the later immigration of Khandayats, Brahmans and other people. Initially, the Khonds were completely at the mercy of the sometimes ferocious and sometimes benevolent, fickle and almighty Mother, and could only hope to win her favour by complete surrender and sacrifices (cf. BOAL 1982). It was with the introduction of the royal and Brahmanic ritual system to the region that they became able to control a part of her *śakti*. In the medieval kings' time, it seems to me that the aspect of the goddess as an almighty single goddess and that of the benevolent goddess in union with royalty were both present. The possibility of shifting points of view on the status of *śakti* in relation to royalty as suggested in Section 4 was probably more relevant in medieval times, though of course they are still observable today.

However, as emphasis came to be placed on the royal and martial aspects of rituals concerning Ramachandi in the colonial period, the significance of *śakti* seems to have shifted more towards that which unites with royalty and bears fruit for the welfare of the village and for the lost but nonetheless well remembered kingdom. The Mother here came to mean one who grants prosperity and prowess to the sons of the land. It was the work of "a distinct male anxiety" (BAGCHI 1990:

71) under colonialism that glorified and worshipped motherhood in order to receive and utilise her generative power for their self-identification as masculine agents controlling and consuming what are their own. In the colonial context, the Mother, representing the earth and thus the land-cum-territory, was a very useful and powerful idiom for asserting the rights of the colonised over what they saw as distinctly belonging to themselves.<sup>10)</sup>

I wonder if it may not be because of such emphasis given during the colonial period to the aspects of masculinity — control, order, dominance — that anthropological interpretations have also often emphasised the theme of control and management of female sexuality by the male in India. I am not suggesting that they were wrong in pointing out such a theme — indeed it exists — but only that it is wrong to assume an “essentialist approach” and to argue that such a theme represents gender relations in Indian culture, and that it is necessary to pay attention to the cultural-politics in a historical context that gave rise and emphasis to such a theme.

I have tried to show how the Ramachandi festival was redefined during the colonial period as a ritual for the performance of the people’s “true” masculine self. Since Indian people were excluded from the domain of state politics under colonialism, the social domain of ritual and religion, in which kingship and caste were depoliticised and decapitated, became the main arena of cultural-politics of identity. This was especially so for the villagers since, unlike the nationalists among the urban elites, they had no discursive capacity for arguing against colonialism in the language of modern political philosophy. Development of emphasis on royalty and martial activities in the semantics of the Ramachandi festival under colonialism was a way of compensating, so to speak, the “wounded masculinity” of the villagers who had to accept subjugation at the level of state politics. The villagers of Garh Manitri contained themselves within the ritualised colonial kingship system in the “inner” domain, while asserting their true masculine identity in a ritualised form and denying the value of state politics in the “outer” sphere<sup>11)</sup>. Such circumstances, however, changed considerably after India’s independence.

## 6. CULTURAL-POLITICS OF RITUAL IDENTITY IN THE POST-COLONIAL ERA

After India achieved independence in 1947, the most obvious change that took place was that the Indian people obtained power in politics of the state. Political independence, however, did not mean sudden and total emancipation from the colonial experience. Most importantly perhaps, the construction of self-identity seems to have remained heavily influenced by the colonial framework, adopted by the people in some way or another to fight the colonial force, and this obstinately haunts Indian people in the post-colonial era.

After independence, the Orissa state government wanted to place the

Jagannath temple administration under its own control, since the state was no more ruled by the "Christian government,"<sup>12)</sup> and, according to the state government reports, the organisation of the Jagannath temple was in a state of confusion (HOTA 1972: 6-7). In 1954, the state assembly established the Sri Jagannath Temple Act and decided that the Jagannath temple would be run by an administrative committee headed by the Puri king with other members of the committee chosen by the state government, that the actual running of the temple would be done by the administrator and that the state government would have the general rights for administration. In other words, under this law, the king lost the right of sole administration of the temple with its large property including Ekharājāt Māhāl under his management as the superintendent. He retained only his symbolic and ritual rights and duties as "the first servant" (*ādya sebāka*) of Lord Jagannath. As a consequence, the revenue of Ekharājāt Māhāl came under the management of the state government. The Ekharājāt Māhāl was finally abolished in 1974 under the Amendments to The Orissa Estates Abolition Act and the *sarbarākāras* lost their positions as well as rights over their *jāgiris*.

Thus in a gradual process after independence, the areas of ex-Ekharājāt Māhāl lost their connections with the colonial royal system. Up till then, the patronage of the Ramachandī festival in Garh Manitri retained its dynamism, as new *sarbarākāras* were engaged in the revenue administration system of the Ekharājāt Māhāl and joined as new patrons of the ritual. With the disappearance of the Ekharājāt Māhāl, however, the ritual was completely decontextualised from the local administration, and the festival of Ramachandī lost its direct relationship with the king who was the source of legitimacy for any changes. Interestingly, soon after the abolition of the Ekharājāt Māhāl, the village people recorded the details of rights and responsibilities regarding the festival in notebooks in order to retain the details of the festival "as it had been carried out from the past." From then on, this festival was conducted according to this record. The festival through which the villagers had sought to re-establish their "masculine" identities under the colonial regime was thus reified and fixed as their cultural "tradition."

What we must note here is the transformation in the meaning of this masculine tradition of the ritual as the wider political context changed. Although the ritual field had probably been the only arena in which villagers could express their masculinity in public under colonialism, they found themselves eligible to participate in politics, appropriation of which by the colonial power was the main cause for the anxiety of emasculation and for resorting to the ritual field in compensation. After independence, the people were admitted, under the principle of democracy, into the domain of institutional politics which was hitherto outside their control, and political activities centring around elections and political factions began also at the village level.

Today, political activity is very lively in Garh Manitri. There are as many political factions as local leaders and political parties get involved in fierce competition for control over elections, government projects and financial aid.<sup>13)</sup>

Violence and minor feuds are not uncommon. In such a situation, on the one hand, the political activities centring around factions (*dala*) at the village level came to be considered as “the men’s work” *par excellence*, especially among the male members of the dominant caste among whom taking factional leadership and showing one’s courage in times of feuds are taken to be evidence of masculine capacity. On the other hand, however, there exists another kind of discursive framework in which factional politics is seen as one of the signs of the corrupted age of the “modern” (*ādhunika juga*) often equated in people’s discourse to the *kalī juga* (Skt. *kalī yuga*, the iron age). This is the fourth and last of the gradually degrading ages in the indigenous mytho-historical scheme, in which the word *kalī* originally means “quarrel” or “hostilities.” People often lament that the village was united in the past as represented in the “traditional” ritual of the Ramachandi festival, whereas today even brothers fight over factional loyalties. Even those who are actively involved in village politics and sometimes boast of their political dexterity admit in other contexts that factions are undesirable.

Thus the villagers seem to have two separate discursive frameworks on the evaluation of masculinity which are alternately employed to appraise, on the one hand, the male capacity to excel in the “modern” political situation, and, on the other hand, the royal and martial “tradition” represented in the Ramachandi festival. We can see here that what constitutes masculinity is more nuanced than in colonial times. Ritual idioms of masculinity performed in the Ramachandi festival had to find their own relevant and limited context, since, though they represent the ideal past and thus constitute their “true” identities, the male villagers living today also have to prove themselves competent in the modern world in order to win material gains as well as honour as men. On the other hand, the importance of ritual identity has grown, so to speak, in the limited context, since it is the only base on which the villagers can claim the particularity and difference of their self identities in the degenerating modern age. It can perhaps be said that the villagers make use of the two different idioms of masculinity in different contexts, either to prove their competence in the modern world or to make claims on their traditional self.

The frameworks for the two kinds of masculinities the villagers now are trying to make use of in different contexts can be said to be a result of colonial and post-colonial history. The division of state politics and society brought about in the colonial regime was a crucial starting point. The ritual masculinity people sought in the social sphere was a compensation for the emasculation most apparent in the loss of power in the sphere of state politics. The ritual masculinity of royal and martial tradition was the idiom by which the Indian people could acclaim their true identity, devaluing in contrast the colonial space of state politics usurped unjustly by the British. When political participation was granted to them, they welcomed the recovery of their masculinity in this field, but at the same time also retained the ritual masculinity on which they had depended for sustaining their honourable identity.

In the discursive framework of the villagers, these two kinds of references for

their identities are referred to as “tradition” (*paramparā*) and “modern” (*ādhunika*). It should be noted, however, that the phenomena they refer to in this framework, the “traditional” royalised ritual of the Ramachandi festival or “modern” factional politics for instance, are both reformulated in the colonial and post-colonial history, based on the existing social relations. At any rate, in the village life of contemporary Orissa, “modern” outer phenomena such as factional politics on the one hand, and idioms of kingship, caste and religion constituting inner “tradition” on the other, are both distinguished and coexisting. People choose and make use of discourses and sets of social relations they deem as appropriate and useful for different occasions.

I should mention in this context that while the modern political masculinity and the traditional ritual masculinity are sharply contrasted in the discursive framework of the villagers, the state government has recently been attempting to reinvent a masculine national culture based on the royal and martial tradition in Orissa and to combine political independence with the “spirit” of independence. One such attempt could be seen in the organisation of a state-level martial art (*pāika ākhaḍā*) competition in which the *śakti* of the goddess Ramachandi was invoked for the protection of the Oriya nation and in which the Raja of Puri was invited as a main guest. This may be seen as an attempt at “reinvention” of national culture through reformulation of the goddess cult and the royal and martial tradition. It goes without saying that such an event added a new aspect to the meaning of the festival of the goddess Ramachandi.<sup>14)</sup>

Furthermore, we may note some other kinds of changes in the meaning of the Ramachandi festival brought about in recent times. Due probably to the effect of the modern market economy and democratic political institutions, there seems to be increasing interest among the villagers in receiving the goddess’s blessings directly and individually rather than as a member of the “traditional” community. There are certain evidences for this. Firstly, there is an increasing number of offerings made individually when the Khond priest worships the goddess in the original rock form. Secondly, there is also an increasing number of devotees prostrating and waiting to have direct communication with the shaman-goddess. According to the village people, previously, only those who went through hard penance and purification, most typically those who stayed on the hill of Ramachandi for many days praying to the goddess and taking only the remains of food offered to her, that dared to come before the goddess for direct communication, and so there were naturally fewer people in the past. Thirdly, there are more animal sacrifices offered individually to the goddess. In 1991, there were more than 50 sacrifices of goats and sheep, and more than 100 sacrifices of chickens. Fourthly, whereas previously the shaman-goddess visited only some houses on his/her procession, the shaman-goddess now enters every house *en route* to bless the family members, particularly married women who cannot come out in public. This, according to one villager, is done to respond to the devotion of each household member. Fifthly, the meaning of writing “We seek protection at the feet of auspicious Ramachandi” at the time of

*daṣaharā* procession seems to have changed from a wish for collective victory and the welfare of the community to making individual wishes to the goddess. I was particularly surprised when I noticed that the chief was not writing the sentence when he was supposed to be the first one to write it, and when I asked the reason why, he answered he was not starting any special work nor had he any particular wish to make at that time. These examples suggest that more emphasis has come to be placed on direct individual ties and contacts with the goddess.

Thus, in the post-colonial period, while there is a direction of “preservation” of the masculinised ritual as the “public” representation of “the ideal past,” there is also a direction of “privatisation” of the goddess’s power for individual welfare. The meaning of the ritual, we can say perhaps, is becoming more diversified today as many standpoints are allowed from which people aspire to receive, utilise or even manipulate the goddess’s *śakti*. *Śakti*, then, by its very nature, is ever dynamic and transformative, and changes its form in different contexts and times.

## 7. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Lastly, I would like to point out that gender and sexuality have to do not only with men-women relations but with a larger world-view related to understanding the identities of self and other. Moreover, it is important to note that the interpretative framework of gender and sexuality cannot be reduced to an ahistorical “cosmology.” Its semantics transforms as the wider politico-cultural contexts change and people aspire to attach new meanings to the framework in order to better understand and place themselves in current circumstances. Thus, the framework of gender and sexuality is constantly reformulated in history and also employed to interpret the history of self and others.

In this essay, I have attempted to look at the meanings attached to the idioms of gender and sexuality in the goddess Ramachandi festival at two levels. In the first part, I tried to delineate what can be said to constitute a fairly stable “symbolic content” (BLOCH 1985) of the ritual and tried to show how interactions between the female principle represented by the goddess and the male principle represented by the king brought about revitalisation of the community and legitimisation of the ritual socio-political order dominated by royalty. In the second part, I tried to put the meanings of such symbolic content in a historical context and to show how colonial experiences and current attempts to overcome such colonial memories influenced the semantic framework of the ritual in relation to the imagery of sexuality and power. Here we can see that the idioms of gender and sexuality in the ritual are related not only to the direct participants in the ritual — goddess, king etc. — constituting the symbolic contents of the ritual, but to the larger power relations behind the scenes which are not explicit in the ritual. The discursive frameworks of gender and sexuality can thus be said to constitute very powerful idioms deployed to define identities in their changing contexts of power relations in history.

## NOTES

- 1) Fieldwork on which this paper is based was conducted from December 1990 to January 1993. I would like to thank the people of Khurda town and Garh Manitri for their hospitality. I am very grateful to Dr. T. Fitzgerald for his extensive comments on a much earlier draft of this paper and to Prof. M. Tanaka for his continuous help and suggestions.
- 2) As van der Veer (1994: 84) says, ritual "can be seen as a form of communication through which a person discovers his identity and the significance of his actions."
- 3) Bloch (1985) argues that the ritual form and its symbolical structure do not change over time. Although he does pay attention to the changes in the "function," as he calls it, of the ritual over time, he tends to reduce the aspects of transformation in the semantics of the ritual in history to mere changes in the authorities to be legitimised by the ritual. While Bloch's work was seminal and important in making researchers more sensitive to the problem of ritual in history, it may be necessary to pay more careful attention to the complex dynamics of cultural-politics over the semantics of rituals in relation to the wider historical context. See VAN DER VEER 1994: 81-83 for relevant criticisms of Bloch.
- 4) Nandy (1983) is a very thought provoking book on various responses and resistances to colonialism by Indian people, though confined to those of the elites.
- 5) Paika, which means foot soldiers, is another name for the Khandayat caste.
- 6) I use the word 'scribe' when referring to the office of *koṭha karaṇa* and *baiṭhi karaṇa*, and 'Scribe' when referring to the Karaṇa as a caste.
- 7) This means "call (the name of the God) Hari." Hari is another name for Viṣṇu.
- 8) This point is emphasised by Hegde and Niranjana (1994) who argue that the goddess who is "with a residue" is not totally encompassed in hierarchy. I agree with Hegde and Niranjana that hierarchy is not the overarching form of relations within a community. On the other hand, however, I would also point out that it is not correct to insist on a possibility of femininity in general going beyond and against male-dominating hierarchy judging from the instances of the goddesses, as Hegde and Niranjana tend to do. We must be careful about the differences between goddesses and human women, and see whether that difference made between them might function to legitimise the inferior status of women in society (cf. TANAKA 1996).
- 9) These considerations lead us to look at another level of the gendered world view in India in which all the phenomena in this world including royalty are considered manifestations of *śakti* and thus feminine. Here, the masculine or Brahma is considered to be the principle supporting the world but never part of it. From this perspective, the interactions of the goddess and royalty in various phases are only different manifestations of *śakti*. Here, there would be no question of *śakti* being encompassed by royalty, since royalty itself is also a manifestation of herself. In order to avoid confusion of levels, I will restrict myself to the relative level of interactions between royalty and the local goddess's *śakti*.
- 10) I owe J. Bagchi (1990) for the inspiration. It should be noted, however, that it is not only the "nationalist aspiration" which the image of the mother represented in the colonial era. The villagers of Garh Manitri, for example, were far from "nationalists" since their pursuit of identity seems to have been based on caste, kingship and kinship (reformulated under colonialism) rather than the nation. Nonetheless, the image of the mother was important for them to define their own sphere in which they could establish, albeit ritually, their masculine selves based on "traditional" idioms that were set in

contradistinction to the colonial condition. In this regard, perhaps it is necessary to widen the scope of research concerning the responses of the colonised to include not only those of the élite “nationalists” but also other “a-national,” though nonetheless dignity-seeking, colonised agents.

- 11) This kind of semantic attitude can be found in mythological histories related to colonialism. In these, the British are always depicted as “cunning” and “adhārmika” political manipulators in contrast to the “dhārmika” Indians who, with the exception of some “traitors,” stand for justice and faith. It should be obvious that the power of state politics under colonialism thus achieved by the British is devalued in their discursive framework. For the use of “inner” and “outer,” I depend on Chatterjee (1993). However, we should note the difference in the form of resistance between the urban élites depicted by Chatterjee and the villagers which I deal with here. Future research should be conducted on the differences in the forms of resistance among the villagers, that between the higher and lower castes, for example.
- 12) This is a phrase one often comes across in the discourses of Indians referring to the British colonial government.
- 13) For the process of factional politics and the participation of men and women therein, see Yumiko TOKITA-TANABE 1996.
- 14) For the details of this competition-ritual and how it involved unexpected moves and repercussions, see TANABE 1995.

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