

The Thighs of Lord Jagannath: Notes on the Jangha Bardeo Cult of the Gond of Western Orissa

Uwe Skoda

The Jangha Bardeo cult, which is centred on two logs identified as the thighs (*jangha*) of Lord Jagannath, appears to be increasingly popular among the Gond of northwestern Orissa, at least since the 1980s. In this essay, I want to show how the rituals of the Jangha Bardeo cult are intrinsically related to the social structure of the Gond as well as to their mythical past as remembered first and foremost by way of the Gond's bard, the Pargania. The rituals of the cult are gaining popularity not only in the widely accepted centre of the cult, the village Bhoipali with its temple (probably built in 1981), but also in at least two other even more recent Jangha Bardeo temples, which I have had the chance to visit between 2001 and 2004. This development seems to indicate an ongoing institutionalization of the cult, but might also be understood as a way of establishing and/or reinforcing a distinctive identity as Gond. It is achieved in an inclusive sense by forging and emphasizing a unity among the 'six brother-clans', which are linked to different totems¹ and six respective gods during the rituals. However, a distinctive 'Gondness' is also fostered in a more exclusive way by incorporating certain Brahmanophobic elements in the cult, which are again elaborated by the Pargania. In this way, an identity is highlighted and directly linked to Lord Jagannath—one of the most important middle Indian gods with Puri as religious centre—without involving, or rather by rejecting, Brahmanical elements and interference. Thus, the unity of the Gond brothers is re-established in the rituals and mythical stories as well as shielded against outsiders.

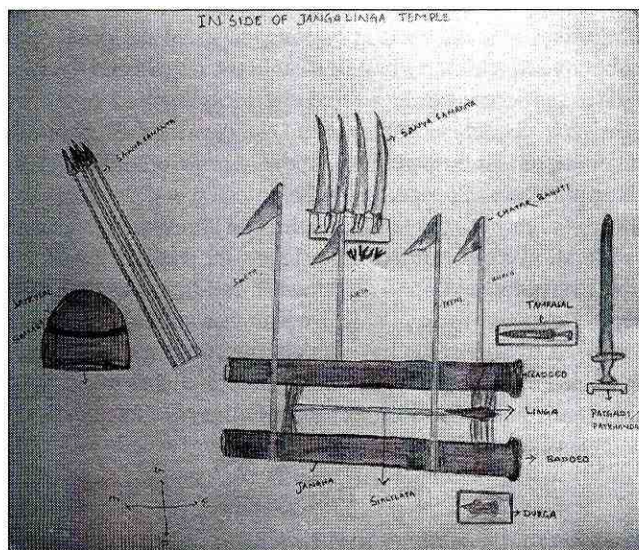
I would like to dedicate this essay to Professor Georg Pfeffer, not only because we both visited the Bhoipali temple in February 2004, but more so because of his sustained interest in social classifications such as clans and totems upon which he elaborated further in his various publications on Middle India (1982) and specifically on the Santal (1984) and Kharia (1993). He also maintained a keen interest on the Gond social structure and this essay may be seen as a rather small piece in the much greater puzzle called 'Tribal Society of Middle India', to which Georg Pfeffer devoted almost three decades of his academic career.

The Ritual

The temple in the village Bhoipali near Bargaon in Sundargarh District of Orissa is widely considered to be the centre of the Bardeo cult in the region. According to a leaflet distributed during an election rally in 2004,² the construction of the temple, which differs to some extent from the typical Hindu temple architecture of the region, started in 1981 after the idol had been worshipped inside the house of the local Naik family for decades.

Inside the temple (*gudi*), one finds two wooden poles hanging on *siali*-creepers that are surrounded by four red flags. A number of weapons worshipped as deities are placed around the two logs, themselves considered to be Jangha Bardeo or the 'thighs of the big god' (*bardeo*—here Jagannath). These other gods include: Linga (a knife in between the two wooden poles), Durga (another knife next to the poles), Tamrusal (a dagger on the other side of Durga), Patkhanda/Patgadi (a standing sword), and Chhattarbahuti (symbolized as flags).³ Other weapons considered to be Sanya Samanto surround the deities as guardians, but they are not seen as individual gods or goddesses. In the southeastern corner of the temple, one finds a metal drum turned upside down, which is recognized as Satrusal or considered to be Garaba (see Fig. 25.1). It plays an important role in the Brahmanophobic myths of the cult, with which I shall deal later.

Figure 25.1 *Gond Deities Inside the Temple*



Source: Sketch courtesy of Atish Satpathy, 2005.

Once a year, on the day of Sama Dossomi, the tenth day of the light side of the month of Pousa (December/January), the main ritual of the gods is celebrated.⁴ The central theme of the rituals—the leitmotif—seems to me to be the unity represented in the permanently recurring number six, which refers to the major deities as well as to the six clans or to the community of all worshippers. Six appears here as a cipher for a whole, which will resurface when discussing the totems.

In the morning before the gods leave the temple a small procession of six women each carrying a *kalas* (a clay pot with a coconut on top of it) starts towards the local pond. The women are accompanied by the ritual specialist of the temple—a member of the Naik family—who worships the six pots representing the six major deities of the Gond. Ideally, each woman should belong to one of the six clans and carry her respective deity. In practice, however, only women of five clans were present on the occasion and a man had to fill the vacancy. Next to the pond a small ritual takes place in which all *kalas* are collectively worshipped, that is, incense and garlands of marigold flowers are presented, *bel*-leaves and rice are offered to each pot, the pots are marked with auspicious symbols and finally they are filled with water. The respective *kalas* are then placed at an altar outside the temple. When the gods are brought out of the temple they are temporarily installed at the centre of this altar in the very same manner in which they are located inside the temple.

While the six major deities remain outside, they are constantly worshipped, initially by the ritual specialist of the Naik family, but later on and perhaps even more importantly by the community of the six clans, each represented by a male member. All six men—at least six, at various stages of the ritual other respected elders might be invited additionally—sit around the deities and the ritual offerings such as incense and lights circle around the idols handed over from one clan member to the next. Sweets are offered and the two logs are anointed with *ghee* (clarified butter) or oil. As one myth has it, the logs absorb all the oil regardless of how much is applied to or dropped over the poles.

Before the idols return to the temple in the late afternoon of the same day male worshippers are allowed to carry the two logs—the Jangha Bardeo. Always two men carry the two poles and once they have lifted them on their shoulders they suddenly begin to run to various sides, which—as onlookers explained—is the wish of the god. As many people have stated, the carriers are in a light trance and thus have no choice but to follow wherever the Lord wishes to go, as he is playing. Finally, Bardeo, it is believed, decides himself when to return to the temple.

The Pargania

Another ritual specialist with an important role in the ritual has not been mentioned so far and that is the bard of the Gond, the Pargania. The reason for the absence of any bard in 2004 was the very limited number of knowledgeable

Pargania keeping the traditions in the region alive today. After searching for a Pargania, I was fortunate enough to meet C. P. Pargania⁵ in Bonai in 2003—one of the very few Pargania who is actually able to sing the myths and play the sacred string instrument.⁶ He is well-known in Bhoipali and is customarily invited every year, however not always present, as he also visits other Jangha Bardeo temples.

The relation between the Pargania and the Gond is, in the Pargania's perspective, one of brotherhood—the Pargania being the eldest brother of the Gond. The relationship of seniority in the tribal context, as Pfeffer (2000, 2002) has emphasized many times, is also one of status. However, the Pargania is also associated with the Gond's bones, which in every Hindu context and among the Gond of northwestern Orissa are clearly associated with impurity and thus considered to be lower in status.

When asked about the relationship between Pargania and Gond, C. P. Pargania narrated the following story:

C. P. Pargania: *The six (sada) clan (bansa) kings of that time decided in a meeting that they as Khetriya, were in charge of the world. They were called pruthibi pati (lords of the soil). They thought that all the Brahmans, Baishnabs, and others would go to see the Ganga (Ganga darsan) and throw the bones of their forefathers in the water of the Ganga. They decided that as they had been and were traditionally (parampara) Khetriya, they should also take the bones (asthi) of their forefathers (pitru) to the Ganga. Then the six brothers thought to themselves, 'Who will take the bones?' All unanimously decided that when the eldest among them would be like their forefather (pitru tulia), he would take the bones of the forefathers to the Ganga. They then all told to the eldest brother (bada bhai), 'O' brother when you are senior (bayajyestha), please take the bones'. The elder brother said that when all the rest take the bones of the forefathers, then so will he. They all collected the bones of their forefathers (pitru pita). Then the Khetriyas worshipped the bones and invited their brothers to meet their caste friends/affines (jati bandhu). They made a garland (mala) of all the bones, placed it on the neck of the eldest brother and bid him farewell for Ganga darsan by playing drums and dancing in a procession. The eldest brother travelled by foot and reached the Ganga. He worshipped the bones of the forefathers near Ganga Devi and then threw the bones into the Ganga river. Ganga Devi could not bear (sahya nahi) to take those bones and threw the garland out into the open land. The Khetriya wondered why Ganga Devi did not accept the bones of the forefathers. It occurred to him that his forefathers must have been sinful (papi), which was why Ganga Devi had rejected the bones. He then decided that if Ganga Devi did not accept, he should go to Yamuna Devi...*

[In the longer narrative the eldest brother then tries to immerse the bones into the holy Jamuna river, into the holy Saraswati river and finally once again into the holy Ganga, but not of them accepts the bones. Ultimately, Ganga herself appears...]

... So Ganga Devi said that she could not accept holy bones. Then he said: 'If the bones (asthi) are pure, I shall not leave them here, near Ganga Devi, because here the crows, dogs and eagles (ravana) will eat them. If I keep them here, the crime of killing forefathers (pitru hatia dos) will also befall my head'. Thus, he took the bones and started to return by foot. On the way he felt hungry. He thought, 'I feel hungry, what shall I do now?' He wondered if he should keep the bones of the forefathers on the ground; but he felt that the crime of matricide (matru hara dos) will befall his head. So he plucked two big leaves of the sahaj tree and put them on the ground and kept the bones on the leaf-bed. He had some food and satisfied his hungry soul (atma shanti). Then he again started walking and entered his own state (rajya). When his other brothers saw him along with the bones, they remembered that their elder brother had told them that he was taking the bones of the forefathers to the Ganga; yet he had returned now from only half the way. ...

[Returning home the younger brothers accuse the eldest one of just having spent the money they had given for the journey without actually having gone there.]

... One of the brothers said, 'No. No. You took money (dhana) and went to the Ganga with the bones of our forefathers, but you did not perform Ganga darsan and came back from only half the way. That is why we are unhappy'.

Then the eldest brother said 'O' my brothers, when I went to Ganga darsan, I did the worship of the bones of our forefathers and when I threw them into the Ganga, Ganga Devi did not accept them and threw them back. So I thought that our forefathers were very sinful (papi) and thus Ganga Devi did not accept their bones. Then I threw the bones in the Jamuna River. But Jamuna Devi also returned the bones to the open field. There, too, it could not be done. Then I entered near the Saraswati Devi. Saraswati Devi also threw the bones out of the river. So again I threw them into the Ganga River. The second time I threw the bones, Ganga Devi appeared personally before me and told me, 'O' Khetriya, I had refused you once, but for the second time again you throw them to me. I can never accept your bones' and Ganga Devi said this; 'all your works (sarba karma) are done with the fire ritual (homa jagya). So the bones of your forefathers (pitru) are pabithra (pure) and not impure (apabithra). Had it been unholy, then I would have accepted it.' So I have come back along with the bones of our forefathers'. He told the story to his younger brothers. Then the eldest brother said, 'Let us do something'.

They asked what they should do. The eldest brother said, 'We have already divided all our father's property, including the utensils (khuri, gina, etc.) and cows, goats, and sheep among all six brothers. So let us now divide these bones and take one share (bhag) each'. The other younger brothers responded, 'No. No, that cannot be done; you are our senior and like a father (bayajyestha pitru tulia); you were at the Ganga, and now you will represent our tradition; from today you are our Ganga. So you should stay away from your brother's bansa and manage yourself separately (olga). We will not allow you into our family.' ...

[The other brothers then convince the oldest one to do all the rituals for them.]
 ... So the eldest brother comes once a year to the houses of the younger brothers, along with the bones of their forefathers. For this they give him a gift/donation (daan) till his death (marte) and as long as he is alive (jinta). Hence, every year the eldest brother enters their houses along with the bones of their forefathers and gives consolation (santana) to their forefathers, takes 64 gifts (Haridan), and returns.

U. S.: Then the elder brother is the Pargania?

C. P.: Yes, the elder brother is now the Pargania ...

U. S.: As in the olden days, do they still visit the houses with some bones?

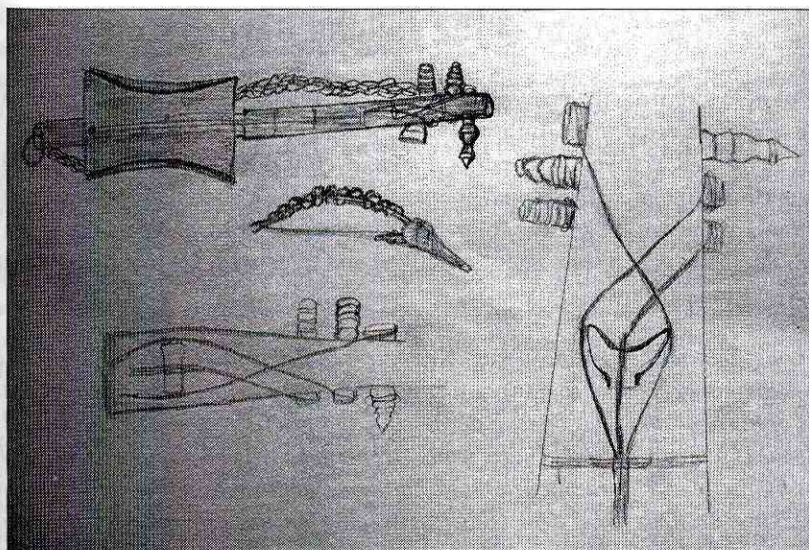
C. P.: Yes, it is there [pointing at this music instrument].

U. S.: Where is it?

C. P.: In this bana (holy string instrument).

Thus, the bones, or at least small reminders, are kept as an essential part of the instrument. In a U-shaped form a bone separates the three strings of the *bana* (see Fig. 25.2). This very same three-stringed instrument is also depicted as the bard's special instrument in photographs by Elwin (2000[1936]) and Fürer-Haimendorf (1948). The latter also mentions the declining relationship from both sides due to economic reasons such as Gond patrons refusing to pay the customary dues.

Figure 25.2 *Bana, a Sacred Instrument of the Pargania*



Source: Sketch courtesy of Atish Satpathy, 2005.

The unique relationship between Pargania and Gond, between bard and patron, has also been described by Fürer-Haimendorf (1950–51, 1979). Though he mentions very different myths regarding the relation, he also argues that the Pargania or Pardhan/Patari, as they are called in northern Andhra Pradesh, are relatively impure in comparison to their Gond patrons, who do not accept food from them.⁷ Interestingly, the apparently ambivalent relationship between the Pargania and the Gond, the former being senior yet impure, is mirrored by the relationship between the Dossondhi as another group of bards and their peasant patrons, the Aghria; even though the ambivalence is expressed in another idiom: the Dossondhi as junior yet purer bards (Skoda 2005). Furthermore, the work of Pfeffer (1993: 222) on the Kharia also indicates a relationship between different segments of the Kharia, the Dhelki and the Dudh Kharia, ordered in the same, and to a certain extent, contradictory way (see Table 25.1).

Table 25.1 *Ambivalent Social Relations in Middle India*

<i>Relation</i>	<i>Marker of High Status</i>	<i>Marker of Low Status</i>
Pargania–Gond	Pargania as elder brother	Pargania ‘polluted’/‘impure’ by contact with bones
Dossondhi–Aghria	Dossondhi ‘purer’ by avoiding agricultural labour	Dossondhi as younger brother
Dhelki Kharia–Dudh Kharia	Dhelki ‘came first’/senior	Dhelki impure—have eaten from pots of the Munda

The Origin of the Jangha Bardeo Cult

Let us now turn from the position of the Pargania vis-à-vis the Gond, to the myths C. P. Pargania is narrating. Information about the history and origin of the cult as well as the deities involved is rather scarce, even if one asks the ritual specialist of the Bhoipali temple. However, people usually—for a good reason—refer to the Pargania as the storyteller. The following accounts are, thus, based on the songs of C. P. Pargania, which were later transcribed and translated. He told the following story of Lord Jagannath:

Long ago, in the Dwapara yug, Krishna was the king of Dwarka. He lost all the members of his clan (bansa) as a result of fighting amongst themselves. At the loss of his near and dear ones, a devastated and grief-stricken Krishna moved to a dense (nikhina) ‘jungle’. There, while sleeping, he was hit with an arrow on his foot by the hunter Jara Sabara. Jara had gone hunting in the same forest and, mistaking Krishna for a deer (mruga) sleeping on the ground, shot the arrow (sara ghata). An injured Krishna lay as still as earlier. Jara thought his prey was dead and slowly moved in closer. After reaching the body he discovered it

was not a deer but Krishna, the king of Dwarka. Jara was mortified and begged Krishna to forgive his crime. 'Unless you fetch me, my dear, the five Pandavas and Draupadi, you will not be pardoned', said Krishna. Obediently, Jara went to execute his order.

The Pandavas came to see the injured Krishna lying on the forest floor. A shocked and inconsolable Arjuna, seeing Krishna in this state, stopped to embrace him and knelt down. While he was trying to lift Krishna, his legendary bow, the Gandiba, touched ever so slightly the nose of Krishna. At this Krishna succumbed to his injury.

The Pandavas contemplated how to perform the last rite for Krishna. They took him to the banks of Sindhu to cremate him. It was noticed that everything except the thigh and navel cord was burnt. Suddenly, a divine sound came, directing the Pandavas to immerse the thigh (jangha) and navel cord (nabi) in the sea. While the navel and thigh were afloat, Viswabasu, who was fishing in the sea, saw them. He thought he was going to make a good fortune as the navel cord appeared to him to be a very big fish. His net caught them and he brought them home. After two or three days he was ordered in a dream to start performing worship (puja). 'You brought me here, so you now worship me', said the voice in the dream. He thus started puja as per the directions of the dream for Nilamadhava (Blue Krishna).

Viswabasu, who was routinely given the duty in the Raja's house of providing fish and meat, now failed to go regularly. On an irregular delivery, Queen Durgabati asked Viswabasu about the reason. 'I am now worshipping the deity Nilamadhava and am thus not able to do justice to my job', replied Viswabasu. Listening to this, the royal couple requested that Viswabasu take them for his darsan. The issueless royal couple insisted that they be taken to the deity so that they could pray near the deity. Viswabasu gave the condition that they would have to seek the permission of the deity before being taken for his darsan. The royal couple agreed to this proposal. The next day, Viswabasu came and said that the deity had agreed to the royal couple's visit, but that they would be taken to the deity with their eyes closed.

The royal couple set out on their journey to visit the deity. While going to Nilamadhava's palace, the king carried a bundle of mustard seeds with him. He dropped the seeds on the way while being led by Viswabasu. After arriving, the royal couple offered their puja; however, they were brought back in the same blindfolded manner.

A few days went by. One day, the king set out on an expedition with his army following the same route where the mustard had sprouted. He could see mustard flowers and trees all along the route. At one point he stopped and made sure that this was the place where Nilamadhava was kept. He saw the deity with his own eyes. Returning to the palace he told this to the queen. That night the queen dreamt of Nilamadhava ordering her to bring him and offer puja. She then asked

where and in what name he should be prayed to. 'I'll be worshipped as Jagannath in Puri', said Nilamadhaba in the dream.

While this account is relatively widespread in Orissa and explains the worship of Lord Jagannath, in another song known as the *Jangha-Linga Katha*, C. P. Pargania linked the Jangha Bardeo cult to Lord Jagannath.

It appears from the above that, like the navel cord (nabi), the thigh (jangha) of Krishna did not burn properly. It (the jangha) was afloat for a while in the sea and then got stuck and covered somewhere. Since Krishna belonged to the Khetriya clan, in a dream he directed the 'Chhadia Khetriya' king Jagat to worship him. The king thought that if he revealed it to his brothers then they might demand a share of it. So he moved alone to bring the Jangha Debta. He tried to uproot it (debta) but failed and came back. Now he requested his brothers' assistance in the endeavour. All then went to help bring back the Jangha Debta, but did not move an inch. The sunyabani (a divine voice) now came directing the king and his brothers to build a temple. 'I would not go and let me be worshipped here', said the sunyabani. The king built a temple, namely the Gandamardan gudi, at the place where the thighs were buried beneath the water. Rana Debi Chandi is worshipped right in front of the Jangha-Linga gudi. Since then, jangha-linga have been worshipped in all the villages.

This story, being not fully consistent with the one above, again stresses the unity of the six brother-clans or the whole of the Gond community, while it also mentions the Chhadia king, the king who belongs to the sixth clan who was originally in charge, even though he is now helpless without his brothers.

In yet another story, C. P. Pargania mentions the *Jangha Debta* in Sundargarh and links it to the local *raja* who started patronizing the cult by gifting land.

When the Jangha Debta became popular in every part of Orissa, Sundargarh was ruled by Baya, a mad king. The king thought that the Gond were playing with people's sentiments and that the Jangha Debta was not genuine. They were unnecessarily offering sacrifice to a false god.

Once the king lost his ring in a big tank called the Rani hrada (lake/tank). He then challenged the Gond to trace his ring in order to see if their debta (god) was real. The said ring was called a fish ring (machha mud) and was given to him by his father-in-law. Upon the king's summons, the Gond reached the shore of the tank. They offered their prayer to the Jangha Debta and then two persons and the debta dove into the tank. The search operation started in the morning and continued until late in the evening. Neither the Jangha Debta nor the persons who dove in came back. So now it was clear that the king would punish the Gond, who (he had warned) would be skinned if they failed to trace his ring. In fact, it was

actually a test for the Gond and their faith in the debta. But as a pale of gloom was heavily falling, the Jangha Debta and the others are believed to have emerged from the water with a fish. The fish had swallowed the ring and had slipped into a cavity of stone. The Jangha Debta found the fish after cutting the stone. When the debta emerged, the king declared a gift of land of 40 acres to the Gond and named it bad deo gaon. With time, the 'deo' was deleted and only 'Badgaon' remained. The king was convinced of the genuineness of the Jangha Debta and the popularity of the deity spread to all the parts of the land.

The Gond as ‘Six Brothers’: The Totemic Clans

Who are these six mythical brothers of the Gond so frequently mentioned? The first answer may be found in publications of the Gond Samaj, the caste organization of the Gond (see Table 25.2).

Table 25.2 *Publication of the Gond Samaj (1982)*

<i>Jati (‘Caste’/Generic Group)</i>	<i>Gotra (Clan)</i>	<i>Gada (Fort)</i>	<i>Kshatriya (Warrior)</i>	<i>Deo (Deity)</i>
Jada Ganga Som	Basista	Sumer	Neti	3 (Tin Deo)
	Kachhapa	Lanchi	Marpati	4 (Char Deo)
	Parasar	Baira	Paresh	5 (Pancha Deo)
	Poulasti			
Surya	Dadhiti			
	Bhardwaj	Chanda		
Gavarb Kadamba		Jagdala	Jagti	6 (Chha Deo)
	Gangish	Hira	Ati	6 (Chha Deo)
	Kalina Gumi	Mandali	Marahi	7 (Sat Deo)

If one asks Gond in the various villages, people often refer either to the Pargania or to their more ‘prominent’ citizen, that is, members of the Gond Samaj such as the former *jamindar* (landlord) of Khuntgaon, who—also a former Samaj president—kept a very detailed, hand-written table of the Gond social structure (Table 25.3).

His distant relative, the former Jamindar of Loida, kept another hand-written list, which, though not as elaborate as the one just presented, deviated in several details from the systemization above, for example, the numbers one and two are mentioned, but the clan names (*bansa*) differ, etc. (Table 25.4).

Keeping these hand-written lists seems to be a matter of status and an indicator of ‘educatedness’ in a largely illiterate society. What is more interesting here is that in all lists⁸ one finds the names of animals—in particular *kashyapa*/tortoise in addition to terms that hint at other animals such as Nageshwar, possibly referring to *nag*/cobra. Sometimes ‘educated’ members of the Gond Samaj explain that

Table 25.3 *Social Structure as Presented by the Former Jamindar of Khuntgaon and Gond Samaj President H. Mohapatra*

<i>Deo</i>	<i>Banskula</i>	<i>Sangha Anchalike</i>	<i>Gotra</i>	<i>Gada</i>	<i>Dham</i>	<i>Debra</i>	<i>Gudi</i>	<i>Chhatar</i>	<i>Jamma</i>
Tindeo (3)	Surya	Neti	Basista	Sumera	Ayodhya	Langha	Balichura	Seta	Dwaja
Chardeo (4)	Chandra	Marpachi	Kashyapa	Lanji	Kashi	Patgadi	Magarmuhi	Pat	Padma
Panchdeo (5)	Jadu	Parekh	Parasara	Birat	Mathura	Bairata	Ranmuhi	Utanga	Shanka
Chhadeo (6)	Kadamba	Jagad	Bharadwaj	Chanda	Hastina	Jangha	Jagdala	Sveta	Chakra
Chhadeo (6)	Ganga	Ati	Gangosha	Hira	Dilli	Tamrusal	Sunamukhi	Lalgula	Chakra
Satdeo (7)	Gagarba	Marehi	Nageshya	Mandala	Aharaha	Chhatrabahuti	Nagmuhi	Meghatabal	Jagyan

Note: The categories may be roughly translated as: Deo (deity), Banskula (clan), Gotra (clan), Gada (fort), Dham (sacred place), Debra (god), Gudi (temple), Chhatar (umbrella) and Jamma (birth).

Table 25.4 *Social Structure as Presented by the Former Jamindar of Loida*

<i>No.</i>	<i>banisa</i>	<i>gotra</i>	<i>gada</i>	<i>jati</i>	<i>dehta</i>	<i>dham</i>
1	Nirakaar (Supreme God)					
2	Brahma, Vishnu, Shiva					
3	Surya	Basista	Sumer	Neti	Saarangpaat	Ayodhya
4	Ganga	Kashyapa	Lanji	Marpachi	Lingaa	Kashi
5	Som	Parashur	Baira	Parekh	Tambrusal	Hastinaa
6	Gaargaba	Bhaaradwaaj	Chandaa	Jagat	Janghaa	
6	Kadamba	Gaangeshwar	Hira	Ati	Tambrusal	
7	Jadu	Naangeshwar	Mandla	Marei	Netakaraati	Barun

these animals are associated with subsections (clans: *bansa/gotra*) as a local way of remembering the proper *gotra*, that is, since the proper Sanskrit names of the sages could not be remembered by the common people, only the names of similar-sounding animals were memorized. However, I tend to believe that it is quite possibly the other way round, older totemic animals were later on, in a move to ‘Sanskritize’—related to famous sages. This is even more likely since the Pargania, when asked about the link to animals or totems, could unambiguously relate a totem-animal to every sub-group of the Gond (or phratry) (Table 25.5).

Table 25.5 *List of Totems According to the Pargania*

<i>Number</i>	<i>Totem (Oriya)</i>	<i>Totem (Possible Translation)</i>
3	Bhag	Tiger
4	Kenchu (Kashyapa)	Tortoise
5	Chila (Chhachana)	Eagle/Hawk/Vulture
6	Bharatia	Bird
6	Kana Machho	Fish
7	Nag	Cobra

So far, however, I have been unable to find any story relating to the origin of the six brothers or a possible link between them and their totemic animals. Besides the appearance of animal names, a significant feature in all lists is the doubling of the number six. C. P. Pargania narrated this story about it:

While Hiragadia Raja was returning from the forest, he felt thirsty and stopped near a flower garden and saw that a beautiful young girl was in the garden and was embarrassed, forgot his thirst and came back. On the second day, the king again went to the forest along with his soldiers on a hunt. While returning, he again saw the same young girl in the garden. The king was very thirsty and felt that he would die if he did not have any water., So he went near the girl and asked for a pot of drinking water; at that time the girl asked the king to show her his sign of being a king. ‘If you show me your sign, I will give you a pot and water to drink.’ So the king gave her his ring (mudi). After the king drank the water given by her, and being satisfied, a relationship developed between the king and the girl (jiu). In this way, a month, two months, three months passed. One day, the king entered the house of the girl, which some people saw. Concerned about the prestige (ijjat) of the king and the girl, they shouted that a chicken (kukra) thief had come and taking this opportunity the king left the house.⁹ But the girl conceived a child (sisuputra), and soon gave birth to a son. People wondered how they would include the child in their society (samaj). All the kings thought about this matter. So the girl took her son and placed him on the sitting place of the king, and also placed the golden ring, which the king had given to her. All the kings saw this and decided that the ring and the child belonged to one man. They recognized that the ring belonged to the Hiragadia Raja, so the child too belonged to him.

Thus, they accepted the child as *six deo*, but as *jagat chha deo* (*jagat* = world and lower status?).

Numbered phratries were mentioned in the literature by Grigson (1991[1938]) for the Bison-horn Gond of Bastar (though explicitly not for the Hill Maria), by Buradkar (1940, 1947) for the Gond of the Nagpur plain and by Furer-Haimendorf (1979)¹⁰ for the Gond of Adilabad/northern Andhra Pradesh. These authors also indicate a clear connection between numbered phratries and certain totemic animals, which, however, deviate from the Gond of northwestern Orissa.

All three authors found a two-level structure consisting of clans and exogamous, patrilineal phratries, the latter to be understood as conglomerates of clans (sometimes also totemic) with mythical ancestors or related to gods or totems.¹¹ In northwest Orissa, I prefer to speak of the six brother-clans, which are exogamous and are generally described as *bansa* or *gotra*. Below this categorization one finds local lines with their own titles such as Majhi, Naik, Dandpat, Kalo, etc., which seem to be irrelevant in the case of marriage. This is in contrast, for example, to the findings of Buradkar, who states that there are clans of the same name in various phratries that consider themselves to be *bhaibond*, *dudhbhai* (milkbrothers—having been fed with the same milk) or *saga* (friends?) and thus do not intermarry.

The typical quadripartite structure of the phratries, which, for example, Buradkar discovered, relates, according to Furer-Haimendorf, to a myth of origin that states that the original 12 Gond left their ancestral cave in four groups. However, as Furer-Haimendorf elaborates, this typical structure can be varied with an additional number eight and, as only Furer-Haimendorf mentioned, before that by a doubling of the phratry number six among the Gond of Adilabad for which he gives a different explanation than the one the Pargania offer (above). The findings of all three can be tentatively systematized in Table 25.6.

Table 25.6 *Phratries and Totems According to Grigson (1991[1938]), Buradkar (1940, 1947) and Furer-Haimendorf (1979)*

Gond of Adilabad (Furer-Haimendorf)*		Gond of the Nagpur Plain (Buradkar)		Bison-horn Maria Gond/Bastar (Grigson)**	
Phratry	Totem	Phratry	Totem	Phratry	Totem
4	Tortoise	4	Tortoise	3	Goat/Cobra
5 (7)	Porcupine	5	Crane (Demoiselle)	4	Cuckoo
6	Tiger	6	Tiger	5	Tiger
6 (8)	?	7	Porcupine	6	Tortoise
7	Cobra			7	Tortoise

Notes: * Furer-Haimendorf's (pp. 80, 85, 95) data are contradictory at times. Referring to marriage, he states that the fifth phratry (or a section of it) and seventh phratry are milkbrothers and therefore do not marry, while later on he does not see any such difficulty for the second section of the sixth phratry, which can intermarry with all others (pp. 4, 5, 7).

** The link between number and totem is implicit by Grigson, but nowhere explicitly drawn.

Buradkar's and Fürer-Haimendorf's scheme have a lot in common, but phratry number five is identified with a crane instead of a porcupine. In both cases, number six is somehow related to the tiger and four to the tortoise. While in northwest Orissa, the number four is linked to the tortoise, the number three is the tiger-group. Only Grigson (1991[1938]: 239) mentions the existence of a phratry with the number three and links it to the goat or cobra. Thus, the six clans in total as found in northwest Orissa differ and apparently the structure presented is a separate regional variant.¹²

It was Georg Pfeffer (1982, 1984, 1993) who took up the matter from the early ethnographers and was the first to apply structuralist methods in order to interpret the totemic structures of middle India. Buradkar (1940) and others limited themselves to documenting the totems or occasionally speculating about the relationship between man and totem in a Frazerian manner. Pfeffer (1993: 223) argued that the totem categories, such as those of the Kharia, 'articulate certain meaningful codes'. If one follows his approach, one can assume that the totems are not coincidentally chosen; rather, they express relationships and it is the anthropologist's task to translate the underlying code.

Following Pfeffer's argument, the various animals can be linked to their habitat in the following way provided that the order of the phratries, particularly the two phratries numbered 6, is correct (see Table 25.7).¹³ However, there are also significant differences remaining or going unnoticed in such a classification alone. For example, among the earth-bound animals the tiger occupies a habitat notably higher than the sphere in which a cobra is found (see Table 25.8).

Table 25.7 *Totems in Relation to Nature Elements*

3	Bhag	Tiger	Earth-bound
4	Kenchu (<i>Kashyapa</i>)	Tortoise	Sea-bound
5	Chila (<i>Chhachana</i>)	Eagle/Hawk/Vulture	Sky-bound
6	Bharatia	Bird	Sky-bound
6	Kana Machho	Fish	Sea-bound
7	Nag	Cobra	Earth-bound

Table 25.8 *Totems in Relation to Differentiated Nature Elements*

Tiger	Earth-bound	Higher on the land
Tortoise	Sea-bound	Higher in the sea
Eagle	Sky-bound	Higher in the sky
Bird	Sky-bound	Lower in the sky
Fish	Sea-bound	Lower in the sea
Cobra	Earth-bound	Lower on the land

Thus, in terms of height or depth with reference to the sea level the tiger appears to occupy a higher position than the cobra, the tortoise a higher one than the fish and possibly also the eagle a higher one than the bird (*Bharatia*). It is

tempting to recognize two moieties here, that is, those occupying a higher sphere in their respective habitat compared to those in the lower strata. The former seem to be also larger in size in comparison with the latter. Similarly, links between the two earth-bound totems, etc., could well be imagined. In cases such as that of the tortoise, however, there is also an apparent crossing of boundaries in the sense that this animal is not completely sea-bound but has a clear link to the land.

However, certain problems of interpretation remain. Not only did none of my interview partners ever mention the existence of such a system, more importantly, perhaps, the knowledge I obtained about these animals is also very limited. Hardly any Gond I asked had seen a bird named *Bharadwaj/Bharatia* and even if he had seen one, he was unable to describe it in a sufficiently detailed manner. The following quote of a discussion with some Gond may serve as an example of the difficulties encountered when specifying animals:

Uwe Skoda: *How does the Bharadwaj bird look?*

Gond: *Its wings are colourful.*

U. S.: *Is it a big bird?*

G: *No. No. It is like our Bharatia bird, the bird which migrates to our zoo and looks like a big bird. That is the Bharatia bird.*

U. S.: *Is it able to fly?*

G: *It flies like a middle-type bird. It cannot fly a long distance. It looks like goose.¹⁴*

Until today I have been unable to acquire a picture or any visual material of the *Bharatia* bird, the *Kana Machho* fish, etc., and further work is certainly required here.

As Pfeffer (1993: 227) also argued, the classification of totems is intrinsically linked to status and status inequality. However, here it is not very clear as to which section is highest in status. Given the list of the *jamindar* of Loida, one may infer that the number three clan has the highest status, if the numbers one and two are ascribed to gods. However, the story of the Pargania regarding the doubling of the sixth section may actually indicate the opposite, that is, the original number six figures lower in the list close to seven, while the more recent section number six—presumably coming into existence through a relation lower in status and named *Jagat* (world?)—is placed close to five. But the number six, *Jagat*, is also linked to *Jangha*—the main deity after which the cult is named. Thus, a clear differentiation in terms of a hierarchy is missing and may well be in accordance with the—at least present-day—emphasis on the equality of the six brothers. Apart from the Pargania himself, I never came across any story differentiating these brothers according to age and it seems that such a division—if it ever existed—is downplayed.

'Brahmanophobia'

While internal differences in status are apparently ignored, a clear line is drawn between the Gond and the Brahmans whose supposed authority as priests is contested or even rejected. On the one hand, Brahmans are explicitly excluded as priests of the temple as well as from the rituals of Soma Dossami. On the other hand, there are also legends about the killing of Brahmans as told by the Pargania, and I will quote one of those stories shortly. The mythical act of killing a Brahman is remembered inside the temple by the so-called *garaalgaraba*¹⁵ in one of the corners of the temple. It is said that inside this drum is kept the skin of a murdered Brahman. Such anti-Brahmanical tendencies among the Gond are not entirely surprising but have been mentioned occasionally in the literature. For example, Pasayat (1998: 97) argues that the Gond, specifically the Rajgond and Brahmans 'developed antagonistic relationships' and the Gond 'considered Brahmans to be their enemies'. Furthermore, the Gond regarded Brahmans as *dhubla buka* (white he-goat) (ibid.), that is, Brahmans were considered to be an appropriate sacrifice and Pasayat cites earlier authors mentioning cases of such sacrifices. Similarly, I was told the rather Brahmanophobic Gond-proverb: 'If you meet a snake and a Brahman, kill the Brahman first!'

The rejection of Brahmans and Brahmanical ideas, however, does not stand in contradiction to the custom of wearing sacred threads or the invitation to Brahmans to perform essential life-cycle rituals. Further, the killing of a Brahman described in the legends is considered one of the worst crimes—possibly the most heinous crime—in the Hindu tradition. Notwithstanding this perception, C. P. Pargania told the following story:

People claimed that the Khetriyas were giving 'blood sacrifice' (bali). But the Khetriyas had not given 'blood sacrifice worship' (bali puja) and only one Khetriya had given sweets like sinni and mohanbhog and had worshipped. The Khetriya prayed (janana) to the 'fanciful, pleasure-seeking god' (basana bhogi debta), to accept the 'milk-offering' (khiri adha). But the Karati god and Chhatra Bahuti were the 'blood sacrifice' (bali) gods, so they did not sit in the line and moved a little to a side (adpatia bosijaichon). They did not find peace (santi) and would be satisfied only when they received a blood sacrifice. Then they said, 'the king worshipped all the Gods by giving them an offering of sinni and mohanbhog, but where is our share (bhag)? The king has forgotten our offering (bhog)'. Then the Jangha Debta said, 'Your mother and father gave birth to you and they could not give you any milk, but the king has worshipped us by giving us sweets and milky food and satisfied us, so what is your problem?' Then Chhatra Bahuti said, 'I need a blood sacrifice'. So the Khetriya king killed three he-goats (buda = buka) and offered a blood sacrifice worship to the Chhatra Bahuti Debta, and she was satisfied. Then the king poured two bottles of wine (mad) on them so that the mahapru (god) would be satisfied. When one bottle of wine had been poured by

the king, she said, 'O' Khetriya king, I had asked you for the blood sacrifice worship and you gave it and we were satisfied, but why are you going to satisfy us by giving wine? So I am giving a curse (abhisap) to all the Khetriya kings that as long as the sun and the moon will be seen this curse will affect them. Daily, day and night, you will drink wine and become senseless, lose your balance and you will not become rich (dhanista)'. Adishakti gave the curse so Gond, even if they work until death, cannot become rich. If today the father earns, tomorrow the son will finish that by drinking wine. While others' properties last for many generations (pat-pat), the property of a Gond is destroyed in the same generation. Then Chhatra Bahuti, satisfied, sat down peacefully, but the Karati god was not satisfied and sat in a corner. Then the Jangha Debta said, 'You two had sat together, but one moved to other side, what is your problem (asubidha)?' The Karati god said that the king worshipped all and satisfied them by giving them offerings of blood sacrifice, sinni and mohanbhog, but had forgotten his share. Then the Jangha Debta said, 'Speak, what do you want? If the king has it, he will give it to you.' Karati said, 'I will be restless (kain tar tar бага mautar bagdoor) until a Brahman is killed and his sacred thread (paita) is brought to me. Kill a Brahman and give him to me to satisfy me.' 'A Brahman is not available in the house of the Khetriya king, so how can he kill a Brahman and give him to you?' 'If the king does not have a Brahman, then see, I shall catch one and give him'. Thus saying, the Karati god threw the wheel wind (chakra paban), which went into every lane, that is, speedily up into 52 lanes and brought a Tamrusal Brahman from Delhi. When he brought Tamrusal Brahman and left him before the 16 house/32 rooms (sola kuthi, bateis bokra),¹⁶ he (Brahman) kneeled down while trying to salute (johar). They killed him from the back and brought out the liver (kalija) of a Brahman and offered it on the head (shire) of the Karati Debta. And the king said 'O', my Brahman- 'eating' (khia) god, please accept the 'milky food' (khira adha)'. After the king gave the god this offering, the Karati god, satisfied, sat down peacefully. But the Khetria were fully drunk and swung from side to side as they did yesterday [the day before interview—when people were carrying the Jangha Linga debta] and removed the skin (chamada) of the Brahman.

Uwe Skoda:

Who removed the skin?

C. P. Pargania:

The Khetriya, who were cursed by Adishakti. After drinking wine and in a drunken condition, they took the skin of the Brahman and to that satrusal dhusa bairika dham (musical instrument/drum) gave a covering. They became busy in the 'dance/acting/singing' (nat kirthan) sat and did not think (chinta) about the god.

U. S.:

So, in this way, they have kept the skin inside?

C. P.:

It was the cover (chauni hela) of the satrusal dhusa bairika dham.

U. S.:

Then why is this skin fixed there?

C. P.:

That was in that place, that is, at the 'place of the God/Goddess' (dham jaga), so it was covered.

This story was not the only one narrated by the Pargania, in which a Brahman was killed. There are other myths about Brahmans who supposedly tried to cheat the six Gond gods, defiled their food, etc., and were subsequently killed. The story and this passage of our long interview with the Pargania (whom we, my assistant Atish Satpathy and I, certainly troubled to some extent with our constant questioning) show two things: First, a clear differentiation among the six Gond gods into four 'vegetarian' gods and two gods demanding blood sacrifice, out of which one goes a step further and is only satisfied with human sacrifice. This god, Karati, seems to be the most dangerous of all and seems no less powerful than the other four 'vegetarian' gods. Second, there seems to be a certain ambivalence towards Brahmanical values, that is, a differentiation of gods along Brahmanical lines, while at the same time a Brahman is sacrificed.

Conclusion

The increasingly popular Jangha Bardeo cult of the Gond of northwestern Orissa links the cult to Lord Jagannath, whose thighs—missing in his temple in Puri—are believed to be worshipped in the rituals. Apart from establishing this relation to a major god in middle India, the central theme of the cult is the affirmation and reaffirmation of the unity of the community. Parallel to the six brother gods (*chha bhai debta*), the so-called six brother clans enact the rituals—six standing here for the totality of the northwestern Gond. This conceptualization of the community is most clearly formulated by the Pargania, the bards of the Gond, who are linked to their patron in an ambivalent relationship and consider themselves to be the most senior of the Gond even though they have been expelled from the Gond-brotherhood due to their handling of the impure bones. While prominent Gond, leaders of the society, former *jamindars*, etc., often present the clans as Sanskritic *gotra*, the Pargania offer clear hints at a totemic structure. The way the various clans/sections are numbered and associated with totems differs from other Gond in the Nagpur plain as well as in northern Andhra Pradesh. Though a deeper analysis of Gond 'totemism' is required, my analysis suggests certain pairs and groupings, which may have had implications in terms of hierarchies or marriages earlier. Finally, the forged unity of all Gond, independent of the status differences that are so prominently highlighted in the cult, is also envisioned by drawing a line against outsiders, notably Brahmans, who are not only forbidden to play any part in the cult but who were offered as human sacrifices to the gods in the mythical stories narrated by the Pargania.

Notes

1. My usage of the term 'totem' should not be understood as an 'elementary form of religion' in the sense of Durkheim (1994[1968]), but is related to the understanding of Lévi-Strauss, as homologous relations, i.e. the relation of a group A to B is thought of as the relation between the totems X and Y. 'The animal world and that of plant life are not utilized merely because they are there, but because they suggest a mode of thought' (Lévi-Strauss 1991[1962]: 13).
2. 'Salute under the feet of Sri Sri Bad Deo. Request', Oriya manuscript, undated.
3. The names given for the gods differ sometimes depending on the interlocutor. They also differ to some extent in the other Jangha Bardeo temples, with Jangha Bardeo being the most important element.
4. I had a chance to observe the rituals in 2004 and the description below refers to the events of that year.
5. A pseudonym has been used.
6. I had met his maternal uncle earlier, who though a Pargania, too, was unable to narrate any myths.
7. Fürer-Haimendorf (1979: 153) doubts the hypothesis of Hivale and Elwin according to whom the Pardhan are the younger brothers of the Gond. S. Hivale, a companion of Elwin in his early years among the Gond, devoted a large part of his work to the Pardhan. So far, however, I have been unable to obtain a copy of his rare book on the Pardhan.
8. The lists deviate from each other in details and at times contradict each other. It documents a plurality of myths.
9. This sentence probably hints at a presumed affair between the king and the girl, which people then tried to prevent by not leaving them alone in the house, but announcing an event—the chicken thief—for which both would have to come out of the house.
10. These findings of Fürer-Haimendorf have been also verified by his student Michael Yorke (1979).
11. Below these phratries, Buradkar found clans with their own clan-deities or even totems, while Fürer-Haimendorf did not find any relation between the clans and the myths of origin.
12. Other classifications of this type are found in Elwin (1991[1942]: 74–75), reporting it on the Agaria, which he believes to be a Gondid community of Middle India. Here one comes across a division into six or eight exogamous phratries—though Elwin speaks of septs—and also of five elements, which he collected around Raipur (CG). One could then abstract the following scheme:

<i>Number</i>	<i>Name of the Phratry</i>	<i>Totem</i>
1 (eldest)	Netam	Tortoise
2	Nang	Cobra
3	Marai	? (Cobra)
4	Kewachi	Kewachi-Fruit
5 (youngest)	Jagat	none

The numbers mentioned in Elwin are apparently not related to the Gond, but appear to be only a stylistic element of numbering for Elwin himself. The names and totems of the Agaria are, however, significant, because they also appear among the Gond in northwestern Orissa—even though in a different order.

13. I believe that this is the right order, since most interview partners supplied the list of sub-sections in this way.
14. Interview, village Sindhukela, 10 April 2004.
15. *Garaa* refers to metal part of drum minus the skin and here sometimes also the word *luha* (iron) is used, while other people say *nisan* referring to the complete drum.
16. *Kuthi* seems to refer to a small house, while *bokra* means room. Some people say one *kuthi* usually contains two rooms.

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The Anthropology of Values

Essays in Honour of Georg Pfeffer

Edited by

Peter Berger
Roland Hardenberg
Ellen Kattner
Michael Prager

Managing Editor
Ellen Kattner

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Georg Pfeffer
on the occasion of his sixty-fifth birthday,
17 January 2007



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System of Kinship Notations

M	mother
F	father
P	parent
B	brother
D	daughter
S	son
W	wife
H	husband
C	child
Z	sister
G	sibling
E	spouse

e	elder
y	younger
ms	male speaker
fs	female speaker
os	opposite sex
ss	same sex