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The Earth, Healing, and Ecological Politics: An Orissan Case

The present essay, an investigation into the relationship between the earth, concepts of healing and political notions in Puri, Orissa, in the context of a volume on culture and development, requires some explanation. It is submitted with the hope that it will make a contribution towards a cultural critique of development as a system of knowledge and a political process. When confronted with the notions of nature, the body, and the body politic in effect in traditional parts of coastal Orissa, one can become aware of the cultural basis of the corresponding categories as used in the various forms that the development discourse take.

The human body (as distinct from the human mind) and the earth are both part of the natural order in that discourse, whereas politics is part of the cultural order. In that discourse the natural order stands in a particular relation to the cultural order; the two are first of all related hierarchically, culture taming and controlling nature. They are also related in a mutually exclusive manner, i.e., whatever is nature is not culture (A/not A), even though by the processes of domestication and taming, culture can transform nature into itself, while maintaining the exclusive relationship.[1] Such a view of nature allows a commoditization of the environment and of its products as well as a purely instrumental relationship to what is termed "natural resources." The economic and political process in a developmental perspective should strive to optimize the development of such resources.

Proponents of development do not perceive these processes as being culturally specific but as resting on universally valid considerations. The view of nature and the environment as potential resources and commodities is taken to be a given rather than to be culturally constructed. By presenting a very different view of the relationship between the earth, the body and the political process held in a non-Western region (coastal Orissa), the cultural specificity of many concepts central to the development discourse should stand revealed.

Development and modernization therefore may not represent an inevitable process of evolutionary progress but rather a Westernization of non-Western cultures.

The Relationship between the Earth and Healing Goddesses

In Orissa, smallpox, along with many other diseases, is referred to most colloquially and most often simply as "mother" or as *thakurani*, i.e., "lady" or "goddess." As such, every village or more generally every territory's goddess is a variant of Śītaḷā who herself is a variant of Dūrgā or Kālī, the Great Goddess. As the village mother, she is the particular earth within that village or territory's boundary. The following description by Egnor of Mariamman, the Tamil goddess of smallpox, could apply precisely to the Orissan *ṭhākurāṇīs*:

> Mariamman "took her birth in earth" (...); she is represented as the head of a woman lying on the ground—or rising from it—and her statue, in the earthen huts which are most of her temples, is of earth.
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> People are born in earth; the home land is "the earth I was born of" (...). "Every child is a good child in his birth from earth." (1978:162-163)

Those born on the same portion of earth, the same village territory share the same mother, namely, the village goddess. As her children, they are all one and form a kin-like community. The village goddess, that is the goddess of that particular piece of earth, is yearly propitiated by the entire community. She is propitiated to avoid misfortune from occurring to her children, namely, to the community; these misfortunes are mostly crop failures and epidemics. In South Western Bengal this village goddess propitiated by the community as a whole is Śītaḷā (Nicholas: 1982). In the plains region of Orissa the village goddess has different names, often names related to the name of the locality, but she is everywhere referred to simply as *ṭhākurāṇī*. In the South Western region of Sri Lanka discussed by Obeyesekere, she is called Pattini. In South India similarly the village goddess whether she is Mariamman or known by a local name, is worshipped by the community for the avoidance of misfortune (Brubaker: 1978). The very failure to propitiate the local goddess causes her anger, which gives rise to an excess of heat which may cause both drought and illness (Obeyesekere 1984:42). To propitiate the local goddess, the whole community shares the economic and organizational burden of the festival. Whatever factionalism and conflict may be dividing the community must be at least temporarily forgotten so that every segment of the community may cooperate with every other.

The annual festival of the local goddess requires the cooperation of all segments of the village community, since no one can be omitted, from the humblest untouchable sweepers and carrion removers, to the

wealthiest landowner, including the local brahmin(s). As in the organization of the daily ritual in the central cult of Jagannātha, the sovereign deity of Orissa, no link however small and humble in the vast chain of tasks necessary to carry out the worship may be omitted. Everyone has an equally valid share in the ritual. The same is true of the village goddess festival. The model can be extended to include the whole kingdom, along with the feudatory principalities: in sharing in the ritual task of worshipping the village goddess, mistress of the local territory, or of Jagannātha, sovereign of the whole territory of Orissa, the people pool their resources and cooperate as equals in this task (Rösel 1980:89). The ritual requires social cooperation, which amounts to social congruence. The most frequent reason for postponing by a year or more the celebration of the village goddess festival is factionalism, and conflict in general, in the local community (Nicholas: 1981). Thus the failure to propitiate the goddess is a political failure. The anger of the goddess arises from anger and conflict in the community which cannot put its fighting aside for the purpose of cooperating in the village festival. The goddess is the earth of the community and when the various parts of her body are at war with each other, are out of congruence with each other, disease, that is—misfortunes due to lack of congruence—is the outcome. Regularly worshipping the village goddess or the territorial sovereign assures that conflict will not be left to grow indefinitely unchecked, to erupt into a major conflagration. Every year some measure of political congruence is necessary in order to carry out the territory's yearly festival and assure the coolness of the goddess and the welfare of the community.

The relationship between agricultural activities, bodily processes and political processes is one of parallelism. All these processes of draining, irrigating and working the land, feeding and draining the body, sustaining and ordering the body politic are seen as being of the same kind and continuous with one another. In order to further investigate these ideas let us turn to an examination of the largest territorial festival of all, meant to be most inclusive in terms of territory and society, the yearly festival of the Chariots in Puri. Puri is the cultural and religious heart of the province of Orissa.

The Land, the Body and the Body Politic

As Zimmermann has put it Ayurveda (medicine) and Arthaśāstra (the science of political management), are one and the same discourse split into two different branches of knowledge (1978:101). Using the specific example of the temple of Jagannātha in Puri and its monumental yearly festival (Ratha Jātrā) I will attempt to understand how

and why healing and politics may be one and the same discourse. Ratha Jātrā is a likely candidate for this exercise since it is at once a major state ritual—reminiscent of those in 19th century Bali which Geertz has called "the theatre state" (Geertz: 1980)—in which all representative segments of the Orissan polity participate, *and* a smallpox healing ritual. The ritual process centers on the illness, treatment and recovery of the three deities in the temple of Jagannātha (see Apffel-Marglin 1985, ch 9). A good place to begin are the paradigmatic notions of the identity between the draining of the body and the putting into cultivation of lands (Zimmerman 1982:9). The two are involved in the parallel and similar activities of irrigation/nutrition and of drainage/depletion of land/body (*Ibid.*:242). The agricultural metaphor in Zimmermann's terms, has a central place in Ayurveda.

Converting uncultivable land into cultivable land is the task of the king. According to Orissan inscriptions the ideal king conquers a kingdom, builds a temple and later reservoirs to irrigate the land. Then he proceeds to gift these territories now valuable because of drainage and irrigation to the deity of the temple and to the Brahmins. The ideal kingdom is illuminated by the sacrificial fires of Brahmins, full of temples reaching toward the heavens in whose lands reservoirs guarantee plentiful harvests, with a king who generously gifts land to the Brahmins (Rösel 1980:99). But agriculture is more than a metaphor since "food is the root of all living beings. . . " (Suśrutra Samhita I, 28 in Zimmermann 1982:221); food is the fount of all human activities (*Ibid.*:224). The chain of being in the universe is the production and consumption of food through repeated transformative processing from the cooking in the earth by the sun and by water to the kitchen fires and cooking water. But all kitchen fires are also sacrificial fires and all food is first offered to the deities. The food will be truly nourishing and sustaining of health, well-being and happiness only through the blessings of the gods. These blessings can be obtained by making offerings to the gods. The gods, being sustained through human food offerings, in return shower blessings on humans. In temple ritual these blessings of the gods are received concretely through the ingestion of consecrated food: *mahāpraśād*. This food has first been offered to the deities by temple brahmin priests and been consumed through the fragrance reaching the deities. After this ritual food offering, the food becomes the leftover of the deities capable of sustaining and blessing humans. In Rösel's words we can say that "this divine kingdom maintained itself with the help of a sacred food-chain, [...] it recycled divine pleasure. It was along this matrix of nectar-feeding lands, service, pleasure [*bhoga*, also meaning 'food'] and grace that the God and his palace town increased and decreased. . . ." (Rösel,

ms:17). The expression "nectar-feeding lands" translates the Oriya term Amruta-Manohini which is applied to lands donated to the temple or to sectarian monasteries for the specific purpose of providing food for the temple kitchen in the form principally of rice (the staple), coconuts and sugar cane.

The ecological language of recycling seems particularly felicitous. The foodchain forms a complete cycle in which the deities play a linch-pin role. From the earth rises the sap into the plants, harvested and variously processed by humans who offer it to the gods who inhale the food's fragrance. At this end point of a continuously ascending and progressively refining process from the earth to the heavens, the food returns and begins a downward path as the left-over of the gods, eaten by humans, who are sustained and whose bodies drain themselves of the impure left-overs—the non-incorporated or non-used parts of the food, i.e., feces, urine, sweat—which returns to the earth. (See Egnor 1978:50; Daniel 1984:85).

This chain of life necessitates for its implementation, a certain type of social/political organization: a king to conquer 'virgin' lands and to drain and/or irrigate them and thereby make them cultivable. Some of these lands must then be gifted to Brahmins who alone can 'establish' (*pratiṣṭhā*) a deity and install it in a temple (Apffel-Marglin, 1985:135). These gifts of land by Orissan kings to high status Brahmins imported from Kanauj in North India established the category of *śāsan* brahmins and *śāsan* villages. They are indispensable in the chain of being that we are discussing because their vedic knowledge and pure manner of living entitles them alone to establish temples and deities to dwell in them. These *śāsan* lands enable the high brahmins to sustain themselves. The king must also give some of this newly cultivable land to the temples to provide the food for the gods. The temples must be staffed by temple servants, some brahmins and some non-brahmins who will carry out the tasks involved in preparing the offerings for the deities, the most important one being food. The cooking must be done by brahmins who are of a lesser status than the *śāsan* brahmins since they are involved in service (*seba*), be it service of the deity. Besides brahmin cooks there will also be need of various other castes such as artisan castes necessary to the cooking process like potters, cowherds, and many others, as well as cultivators. These temple brahmins (*deoli-brāhmaṇa*) cook and offer the food to the gods, who inhale the cooked food's fragrance. What the gods do not use, namely, their leftover food, is then distributed to all those who serve in the temple and nourishes them as well as conveys the gods' blessings to them. It can also be purchased by pilgrims visiting the temple and nourish and bless them.

The king is an earthly incarnation of the divinity, Jagannātha; for this deity is the real sovereign of Orissa. Whatever sovereignty an earthly king possesses can only come from the divinity. This divine sovereignty is established in the king by the *śāsan* brahmin at the time of his coronation. The king is also a temple servant; the first among all temple servants. His relationship to the sovereign divinity is one of service and he carries out certain types of ritual service in the temple, the most important of these being at the time of Ratha Jātrā, when his position of humble servant of the divinity is displayed to the thronged population who have come to participate in this major ritual of state. (Apffel-Marglin 1985).

This idealised and simplified political and social implementation of the chain of life leaves out many things of course. One of these elements which must be mentioned is the sects and their monasteries (*mathas*) which also have been gifted lands whose produce is reserved for the deities. The head of the monasteries (*mahanta*) also perform services in the temple (Rösel 1980:90 passim).

The maintenance of this chain of life necessitates the whole spectrum of Hindu society; the warriors whom the king needs to conquer and then protect the land; the two main classes of brahmins and all the other castes necessary to agricultural production, food processing, the disposal of bodily wastes, the construction of temples and human housing, etc. The deities enable the ascending chain of food to begin its return journey to sustain human life. They stand at the apex and the turning point. Since the gods will only accept pure food cooked by pure hands, temple brahmins are indispensable. Vedic brahmins of course can be said to be the most indispensable of all since without their knowledge of the powerful words the deities could not be fed in the first place since they would not dwell among humans. The king by his conquering and agricultural development activities makes it possible to begin the chain of life and once begun and ongoing, to protect it. But he is an enabler among others. As a warrior and a hunter (a royal prerogative) who sheds blood—an impure activity—he is disqualified from being able to offer food to the gods. His very sovereignty is acquired through the powerful words of the vedic brahmins. He is totally dependent on the two classes of brahmins as they are on him since without him they would have no land and therefore could not sustain themselves.

For this particular cultural construction to have any reality, or in other words for it to become a lived experience, necessitates the existence of a particular social and political organization. Let me attempt to sketch in an ideal-typical way what these social-political requirements are. The existence of deities who require offerings of

pure cooked food as a necessity for human beings to be nourished means that one cannot sustain oneself merely by one's own efforts and feed oneself directly. One needs different types of brahmins, the brahmins need different types of castes to carry out those activities which would pollute them and therefore render them unable to establish and feed the gods. Everyone needs to be protected; the protector because of his activities is also unable to feed the gods himself, and therefore to sustain himself. In other words, this cultural construction demands a social and political order in which everyone is interdependent; everyone needs everyone else because of the deities and their particular requirements. Each function is necessary to maintain the chain of life. This is best seen in the organization of a large temple like that of Jagannātha in Puri where there are 108 different functions carried out by some 7,500 temple servants (Rösel 1980:4-7,71). In the carrying out of the elaborate daily ritual which consists of the sensual pleasure of the deities—food, bathing, clothing, fragrances, cooling, singing, dancing, sleeping and others—the omission of one single link in the vast chain of actions either grinds the whole operation to a halt (Apffel-Marglin 1985:94) or renders it invalid. Each function, however humble, is absolutely necessary.

There is a functional equality between the various services rendered in the temple; this equality is given by the deities who create the services in the first place by their bodily requirements (Rösel 1980:87). This functional equality between all the varied services rendered to the deities does not mean that they are all equally esteemed or prestigious, only that they are all equally necessary. Those who can come closest to the deities are much more esteemed than those who are low on the return path on the chain of life, closest to its end point, the earth as the receiver of life's left-overs, which of course is also its beginning.

The number 108 is a magical one and has grown from the original 4 in the 8 centuries of the temple's existence. Each named service can be carried out by several persons. The number of persons the temple could support was, before the advent of a cash economy, totally dependent on the amount of land possessed by the temple or gifted to other institutions specifically for the purpose of offering food in the temple. All persons carrying out some service in the temple were fed by the temple. Access to temple service was achieved through hereditary or in the case of the creation of new services, or the addition of persons entitled to perform an already staffed service, through competitive and conflictual maneuvering. Rights to perform certain services can be bought and sold among temple servants. It is important to realize that the various services do not correspond necessarily and even typically with caste divisions. Three-fourths of all temple priests are brahmins

and they share among themselves the great majority of services (see Apffel-Marglin 1985:46). Judicious marriages are another way of gaining access. Rösel summarizes his description of the jostling and competitive behavior by saying that it amounted to an ordered disorder (Rösel 1980:80), the disorder being kept in bounds by the absolute necessity of cooperation. Order is maintained mostly in a decentralized manner since each service group has at its head a "general" (*bishoi*) in charge of law and order within its own group. There was a person responsible for the overall smooth running of temple activities, the *parikshā*, a *śāsan* brahmin. But he mostly delegated his powers among several temple servants (*Ibid.*:81). The temple both grew and functioned in a decentralized and somewhat anarchic manner.

New services or new entitlement to existing services were carefully recorded by temple brahmins in special documents since each service consisted of the privilege of receiving support from tax free temple lands (these privileges are called *mahal*). The role of the king as first servant of the deity was not one of being able to create or even allot these privileges but only of confirming them through royal official recognition. This is how Rösel describes the situation:

> This process of differentiation was at the same time one of diversification. It was not the evolution of a deliberately devised, efficient system of division of labor; instead the present diversification represents more the outcome of eight centuries of mutual alliances, intrigues and suspicion of different, often antagonistic priest groups, eager to intrude into new services and jealously guarding their own against the interference of others. Normally an already internally accomplished system of division of labor was reconfirmed by a king, through the official recognition and installation of a new service, with the subsequent allotment of new shares of holy food and clothes. (Rösel ms:6-7).

The king's official recognition came in the form of the granting of titles and was publicly displayed in the ritual of "tying the sari," that is, tying a piece of the deity's clothing onto the head of the honored persons. The king could grant such honors (*maryādā*) not only to temple servants but to members of the many monasteries in Puri (Rösel gives two separate estimates of the number of *mathas* in Puri, 91 and 70; 1980:92) as well as to feudatory *rajas*.[2] These honors entitled their receivers to carry out some service in the temple or during certain festivals and to the display of certain paraphernalia symbolizing their honorific status. Clearly, the king had greater maneuverability and could act in more than simply a rubber stamp fashion.

Furthermore and very importantly, these honors conveyed upon their recipient some portion of the divine sovereignty. This was expressed in the tying of the cloth of the deity onto the recipient's

head. Thus, even though the king of Puri is called the "moving Vishnu" (*calanti visnu*), he is only the first among others and sovereignty is not an exclusive royal monopoly. The king is also only a link in the chain of life even though he is a very important link. In fact, all those living in the kingdom were part of the chain of life but some were recognized through the receiving of royal temple honors as more important than others. Of course there was competition and conflict over the conferring of these privileges, but in managing these conflicts when they erupted beyond the capacity of groups to arbitrate them themselves, the king's actions

> "were not legislative, insofar as they were always addressed to specific groups and individuals, were not of general applicability, were subject to alteration or repeal according to current needs of kingship, and could not fix the law or even strictly serve as an illustration. Furthermore, the administrative actions of the Hindu king in respect to the South Indian temple were context sensitive and context bound in an organizational sense as well. Thus, there does not appear to have been at any time a single, centralized, permanent bureaucratic organization (on the Weberian model). Instead, there was a temporary affiliation of a number of local groups, constituted by, or in the name of, the king and empowered to make public decisions on specific matters. (Appadurai 1981:214-215).

As Appadurai's careful historical study shows this organic state of affairs was fragmented during colonial rule. For example, the competition between two sectarian groups for control of temple affairs was legislated by the British into two mutually exclusive groups, the winner being the Tengalai sect, the loser the Vatakalai sect, the latter being legislated forever out of involvement in this particular temple. This legislative action bases itself on universally valid, non context-sensitive, rules. These findings of Appadurai in the context of a South Indian temple seem to fit perfectly with the historical study of the Jagannātha temple done by Rösel.

What is, for the purposes of the present argument, essential to note is that the structure of authority in the temple and beyond the temple, in the kingdom, was not a pyramidal, centralized one. Everyone's position was determined and recognized in terms of one's relationship or rather service to the deities. The deities are the only source of absolute authority. The fiction of a deity who is the actual owner of the land, who requires to be fed pure food, and who is the fount of all authority and all blessings, enables the existence of a very real, non pyramidal, multi-centric political landscape. In fact, the distinction between fictional and real is less than useful in this context. At one empirical, positivist level, such a deity is a fiction; at another level, that of lived experience and human social and political life, it is very much

real in the sense that without it, the whole tangible edifice of the way people act would collapse.

In the great chain of life as exemplified in the functioning of a great temple such as that of Jagannātha, disruption, conflict or disorder is what disrupts the vast cooperative task of worship. If any one group or person in the many services all equally required for the ritual to proceed is out of phase, the whole process stops or becomes invalid. Similarly in medicine, "sickness is a kind of being-out-of-phase, and medicine an art of good conjunction" (Zimmermann 1980:100), an art of restoring congruence between various elements of the body, the environment, and time, that is an art exquisitely and exclusively context sensitive. The king, like the physician, must restore good conjunction between all the elements of the kingdom so that the chain of life may continue, an activity which has to be by necessity context sensitive and is the royal activity of "protection."

Let us shift our focus to the vast ritual of state enacted yearly in Puri in which the king's ritual action has both medical and political meaning. Furthermore, the whole festival is a political event, the very demonstration of political health and vigor in its ability to smoothly (if it is successful) orchestrate the cooperation of all temple servants, monasteries, other representatives of the society at large such as cultivators, as well as in the pre-independence days the heads of the various tributary minor kingdoms, and since independence various representative members of the state government. This monumental endeavor requires enormous pooling of both economic and organizational resources. It is also the occasion when the current configuration of honors and privileges is publicly displayed. Although I have previously described in detail the sequence of this festival and how its processual structure is organized around the illness, treatment, and recovery of the deities (Apffel-Marglin 1985) it is only this past January while conducting preliminary field research on traditional methods of dealing with smallpox that I gathered enough information to make it clear that the deities' illness was specifically smallpox. The fact that this realization did not surface during my previous field work when smallpox was not of primary concern to me, probably indicates that with the progressive decline and final disappearance of this disease from the region, this part of the significance which the ritual had has receded from people's awareness. However, it may also be a function of my lack of sensitivity or of not asking the right kinds of questions. It is hard to know which.

In any case Śītaḷā plays a key role in this festival and is popularly credited with making the deities' ill. Perhaps it is the case that everyone implicitly knows that the disease Śītaḷā sends is smallpox, although

Śītaḷā is the goddess of other poxes and infectious diseases such as chicken pox, measles, rashes, cholera, plague, gastroenteritis, diarrhea, and typhoid.[3] The treatment the deities are given after they have been drenched by the water from Śītaḷā's well in the outer compound of the main temple parallels the treatment given to a sufferer of smallpox at home.[4] The kitchen fires in the temple are extinguished; ony cold foods are offered to the deities; no strangers are allowed in the temple which is closed to pilgrims during the fortnight of illness. No singing and dancing takes place and no shouting or quarrelling should be heard.

In a conversation my collaborator Purna Chandra Mishra had with the wife of a priest of Jagannātha, she was telling him about her son's bout with smallpox and explaining about what was done in the house during that time: no frying, no hot food, no singing, no shouting, worshipping daily Śītaḷā in her temple and generally being gentle and compliant with the wishes of the patient who is addressed as Mā and those of goddess Śītaḷā as tradition knows them. Confrontation, aggression, as well as too great joy and celebration are both avoided; extremes are avoided and gentleness is emphasized. Not doing all these things would offend the goddess and bring on her anger in the form of an intensification of the disease. No strangers—non family members—are allowed in the sick room. All food—only boiled, non-seasoned, non-fried foods are consumed along with cooling drinks such as green coconut water and sweet milk with banana—is first offered to the sick person and then consumed by family members.

On the last day of the fortnight of illness the deities have recovered and the public can enter and see them. This is called the "viewing of the new youth." Two days later the deities are carried in great pomp outside the temple and placed each on one of the three huge wooden chariots (*ratha*) specially prepared for the occasion. The king emerges then from his palace a few yards across from the temple, carried in a chair, surrounded by his *śāsan* brahmin preceptors, ex-feudatory *rājās* and some male agnates. He ascends the temporary ramp of each of the chariots in turn and proceeds to first sweep the platform around the deity, circumambulating it, using a gold handled broom, then repeating his steps and sprinkling water fragrant with sandal paste from a pot and lastly he does a third circumambulation sprinkling powdered sandalwood. Ths ritual, referred to as the "sweeping ritual" is one of the dramatic highlights of the festival.

The chariots are then, one after another, pulled by the mass of pilgrims and dragged to the northeast some 2-1/2 kilometers away to a temple called Guṇḍicā where they will reside for 7 days. The whole process from the end of the king's sweeping to the end of the deities'

temporary stay in Guṇḍicā's temple takes 9 days and the period is referred to as the "nine days festival" and on the 10th day the deities are replaced on the chariots. The king repeats his sweeping ritual and the chariots are pulled back to the main temple. This is called the "return festival" (*bahuḍa jātrā*). By the 11th day the deities are returned inside the main temple.

Focusing on Śītaḷā, I became aware that the king's action of sweeping and sprinkling, besides making him an untouchable sweeper (a fact much foregrounded and discussed by informants), were also the actions which goddess Śītaḷā is said to carry out when she wipes away the disease. The most commonly found iconography of Śītaḷā shows her sitting on a donkey, holding in one hand a broom and in the other a pot full of water. On her head she carries a basket or a winnowing fan full of pulses.[5] When she shakes her head in anger, she spreads the pulses and gives the disease. When she sprinkles cool water from her pot and sweeps the scattered grain away, she removes the disease. The king's action, punctuating the movements of the deities to and from the temple of Guṇḍicā parallels exactly the goddess' healing actions.

The temple of Guṇḍicā is empty for the rest of the year, having no installed deity. The name Guṇḍicā is that of the wife of the legendary founding king of Jagannātha temple. However, one of the more obscure meanings of the word *guṇḍi* is "pox" in Oriya,[6] even though this is not a currently used word. According to Nicholas (personal communication) the Bengali Guṭikā becomes the Oriya Guṇḍicā. Guṭikā is another Sanskrit word for smallpox and is the name of the smallpox goddess mentioned in 1767 by Holwell. The identification of Guṇḍicā with smallpox became confirmed to me by informants this past January (and subsequently to P.C. Mishra).

Two informants talked about the disease as the "nine days festival" and called the 10th day "the return festival" when the goddess departs, i.e., the patient recovers. This terminology is the very same one used to refer to the journey, stay, and return of the deities to and from the Guṇḍicā temple. It now seems to me that the peculiarity of visiting an empty temple may express the fact that the goddess visits in people (i.e., they suffer from smallpox) and then returns where she usually dwells, leaving them empty of the goddess, i.e., recovered. The deities visiting temporarily in Guṇḍicā temple may signify their bout with smallpox.

I am aware of an unresolved difficulty in this new line of interpretation—added on but not contradicting my earlier published interpretation. There seems to be two bouts of the disease; one inside the main temple, lasting a fortnight and one outside the temple, lasting 9 days. The greatest difficulty of course is that the deities have recov-

ered at the end of the first bout. But symbolic language is not univocal, linear, or literal and I am sure that with greater information and imagination I may be able to resolve those puzzles. I could give more ethnographic details about the festival and smallpox healing but these will have to wait for the opportunity to do a lengthier and more ethnographic treatment of the topic.

I would like now to shift attention to the political meaning of the king's sweeping ritual. As people often repeated to me the king displays here his relationship to the deities; he is to them as the humblest of servants; an untouchable sweeper (*haḍi*). Even though he is hailed as he emerges from the palace by shouts of "Victory to the Mobile Vishnu!" his divinity is a partial emanation from the ultimate sovereign, Jagannātha. In performing services for Jagannātha other persons can share in this divine sovereignty; speaking of the situation in the late 17th and the first half of the 18th century, Kulke describes one instance of this "sharing": "The Rajas . . . tried to gain and to assure the support of their feudatory rajas (. . .) by "sharing" their own position in the state cult with them," (Kulke 1978:339) and "granting honors and privileges to these feudatory rajas such as having a big drum beaten for them (a symbol of sovereignty) during their visit to Puri on the occasion of the great festival" (*Ibid.*:342).

Being the sweeper of the divinities expresses at once the king's absolute subordination to the deities, his relationship of service to them, and also the fact that he is not the ultimate, absolute source of sovereignty. He performs a service for them and shares this activity with many other persons. The king is the foremost among several other "mobilizing actors" to use Appadurai's term:

> Authority is the capacity to mobilize collective ritual deference to a sovereign deity in such a way that the mobilizing actor partakes of divine authority in relation to those human beings who are either the instruments or beneficiaries of such workship. More simply still, authority is the capacity to command collectivities in the homage of the deity. Of course, given the sociological complexities of the ritual process and the incomplete jural capacities of the deity (. . .), such authority *can never be monopolized* by any one individual or group and must always be shared. (Appadurai 1981:226; my emphasis)

What links together the medical and the political meaning of the king's sweeping ritual is that the king, as the physician of the body politic, is part of what I would like to call an "ecological political system" where congruence, mutual adjustments, and context sensitivity are the order of the day, as they are in medicine.

Conclusions

In this Orissan example we are faced with a reality in which agricultural, medical and political processes are seen as being of a kind. The political process consists of a balancing or a harmonizing between various parts of the society. The bodily processes also consist of a harmonizing between hot and cold intakes which consists of a harmonizing with the land and its products as well as with the seasons. The variations in heat and cold during the seasons dictate the appropriate countervailing diet in terms of hot and cold in order to balance these two poles. The land, the body, and the body politic are all part of a single great chain of life; it cannot be fitted into a nature/culture opposition of the sort that underlies most of the Western discourse on the land, the body and the body politic.

In modern medical epidemic control as exemplified in the smallpox eradication campaign of the World Health Organization and the Government of India in the 1970s, the disease is viewed as the enemy which has to be searched and destroyed.[7] Disease and suffering is to be eradicated. Such an attitude cannot be shared by traditional Oriyans for whom disease is understood as an imbalance between a variety of factors and health as a restoration of balance between these same factors. No factors therefore can be targetted for extermination. Goddess Śītaḷā embodies these factors: when she is hot and angry she dispenses the disease; when she is cooled down and peaceful she cures the disease. This for the Western mind is a paradoxical way of approaching disease since disease and the absence of disease are seen as mutually exclusive opposites of the logical form A and not A; health is the absence of disease. The same logical structure pertains to the distinction between inert nature and man's activities to exploit natural resources. Man's economic and political activities are of a totally different kind from natural processes; the former belong to the realm of culture and the latter to the realm of nature. It is in the order of things that cultural activities act upon nature to domesticate it for the use of human beings. This view of reality, no less than the Oriyan view of reality, is culturally constructed as well as religiously based. In the Western world's myth of origin, Genesis 1, 2 and 3, the fundamental opposition between creation (nature) and the creator (culture) is established.

Human beings are both of the realm of creation (created by the Creator God) and mirror divinity since they are created in God's image (Gen 1:26). The tradition has on the whole understood this ambiguous human creature as being formed of a natural part, namely the body, and a non-natural part, namely the soul; the soul's modern heir being the mind. Furthermore, God told the first human beings to subdue

creation and to have dominion over it (Gen 1:28) for the purpose of using its products (Gen 1:29). In our myth of origin, the basic relationship between nature and culture and human beings' role in it is set up. It is a world order which is still with us, albeit shorn of its religious context. It has become part and parcel of our secular, scientific mode of thinking. The Oriyan example briefly sketched above shows that a different reality is possible and does exist. It should, if nothing else, prompt a critical reappraisal of the value-neutral and universalistic claims associated with most of the development discourse.

NOTES

1. For a discussion of the (Western) cultural specificity of the nature/culture dichotomy as used in the natural and the social sciences, see the essays in McCormack and Strathern, *Nature, Culture and Gender*, Cambridge University Press 1980.
2. See Appadurai 1981 for an illuminating treatment of the topic of honors.
3. I am deeply grateful to Oopalee Operajita Kennedy for her invaluable help in introducing me to her aunt, Dr. S. Das, who provided me with much information on this topic. Other informants identified each disease by its name plus *mā* (mother); others simply called any disease, including smallpox, *thākurānī*, meaning simply goddess; others identified smallpox as *basanta* or *basanta mā*. *Basanta* means also spring, for the disease became epidemic in this season which in India is the hot season (see Nicholas: 1981). Another informant said that Śītaḷā, Mangaḷā, Bimaḷā and Buḍhimā were all of the same family and all connected with disease.
4. For a detailed description of the whole I refer the reader to my monograph *op. cit.*
5. The Sanskrit name for smallpox, *masurika*, means an orange pulse (Nicholas: 1981); the similarity of the smallpox pustules with orange pulses being at the root of this name.
6. According to my Oriya dictionary and confirmed by an informant.
7. For a cultural-historical discussion of this campaign see my article "The Eradication of Smallpox, the Cult of Śītaḷā and Ecological Politics," paper presented at the conference on "Technological Transformation in Traditional Societies: Alternative Approaches," UNU/WIDER, Helsinki, August 1986.

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