

Cultures of Christianity and Colonialism in Chhattisgarh

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This paper addresses the master theme of social dimensions of religious movements by raising questions and highlighting issues in the study of the evangelical encounter in colonial Chhattisgarh.¹ The encounter was located at a critical intersection of meaning and power: the engagement of the mission project with colonial cultures of rule; and the interface and mutual imbrication of Protestant theology, evangelical beliefs and practices of missionaries with the principles of caste and sect and the institutions and dynamics of village life. The missionaries, indigenous catechists and helpers, native converts and congregations and members of the local population were protagonists and players in dramas of divergent perceptions and contradictory practices. The small particulars and little details and the sharp lines and broad contours of a specific historical and ethnographic case reveal the wider implications of the evangelical encounter: the mutual fashioning of cultures of colonialism and Christianity in Chhattisgarh.

A large number of studies of the mission project, missionaries and Christianity in South Asia have been produced by church historians. This literature provide us with detailed chronicles of actions and events.² Several other exercises in the field have once again been guided by the rather simplistic assumption that Christian converts in India tended to replicate a modernised social order—with the exception of caste—in the image of the missionaries.³ It is only in recent years that historians have begun to explore the meanings of conversion and the articulation of missionaries, converts and Christianity with indigenous schemes of rank and honour, caste and sect.⁴ At the same time, this work has focused on Orthodox Churches in south India. The evangelical encounter in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and its engagement with the colonial enterprise remains a relatively neglected area of study.⁵ The significance of the issues embedded in the theme is suggested to us by studies in the anthropology of colonialism and Christianity and of 'radical culture contact'.⁶ Clearly these issues need to be incorporated in the agendas of South Asian historiography and ethnography.

In 1868 Oscar Lohr, the first missionary of the German Evangelical

Mission Society, initiated mission work in Chhattisgarh, a large region bound through linguistic ties in south eastern Madhya Pradesh. The pioneer missionary had been drawn to the region by the Satnamis. The Satnamis, Lohr's preliminary enquiries had revealed, were heathens with a difference: they were a monotheistic group whose 'creed' opposed idolatry and caste.⁷ To the missionary this was a providential connection. It was willed by the Lord. Would the flock not be delivered once it witnessed the Saviour? The Satnamis did not see the coming of the millennium. The group declined its 'destiny' and proved elusive. The missionaries continued to toil the field. The halting enterprise of conversion grew through ties of kinship and the prospects of a better life under the paternalist economy of mission stations. Over the next few decades the missionary enterprise in the region expanded. Members of the German Evangelical Mission Society were joined by missionaries of other denominations—the American and General Conference Mennonites, the Disciples of Christ, the Methodists, the Pentecostal Bands of the World—and there was a move to work with other communities. The converts continued to receive missionary regulations through the grid of local cultures. The 'harvest', never bountiful, was indeed more than a little curious. The missionaries tended. The missionaries reaped. If they made headway, they also had to retrace their steps.

We have in recent years had forceful reminders that the white man did not always command the initiative in processes of cultural encounter.⁸ In 1868 the missionary Oscar Lohr visited the Satnami guru at his home in Bhandar on the occasion of the community's 'annual festival'. The missionary described in detail how he was seated next to the guru and served refreshments. He made the triumphant revelation to a 'great mass' of Satnamis that the real *satyanam* (true name) was Jesus Christ. Lohr was elated by the warm welcome. He inadvertently ventured into the realm of ethnographic representation and the pursuit of indigenous meanings when he stated that the Satnamis had stroked his beard to show him great honour and affection in their 'traditional way.'⁹ The encounter was indeed seized by missionary legend-history and ordered as an event of monumental significance. But was the stroking of Lohr's long flowing beard really the enactment of a timeless, mysterious and customary ritual? Or was it a mere display of Satnami curiosity? Was the serving of refreshments by the guru the extension of hospitality to a white *saheb*, a western master? Or had the missionary lost the initiative? We need to consider the possibility that Lohr's visit to Bhandar on the day of *gurupuja*, along

with thousands of Satnamis, had unwittingly signified his acceptance of the guru's authority. Had the missionary, perhaps, been incorporated as an affiliate in the domain of the guru? Three months later the missionary went on to challenge a principle of faith within Satnampanth. The curiosity did not translate itself into conversions, the hospitality was replaced by hostility. The millenarian hopes of Lohr lay in ruins.¹⁰ This is one tale. There are other stories.

What were the links between the mission project and colonialism? The question can all too easily translate itself into a rigid polemical divide: the rival caricatures of the crafty agent of imperialism and the philanthropic apostle to the natives become the principal protagonists of competing shadow plays. The debate, Jean and John Comaroff have pointed out, gets confined to the issue of 'Whose side was the missionary really on?' and by extension 'Whose ends did he serve?': a complex historical problem is turned into a crude question of cause and effect.¹¹ The way out of this narrow and constricting impasse of competing instrumentalities, it seems to me, lies in a close analysis of the mutual imbrication of the cultural, basis and political implication of the mission project.

It was not often that evangelical missionaries in Chhattisgarh intervened in the arena that is conventionally designated as 'political', the domain of institutionalised power relations between the colonial state and its subjects. At the same time, the links between the mission project and colonialism could lie elsewhere. First, we need to examine the missionary participation in the aggressive fashioning of authoritative discursive practices. An insidious and pernicious commonplace among historians and theorists of colonial discourse holds that the figurative construction of powerful images of the non-western Other was carried out by a unified conquering colonial elite with a uniform Western mentality. Missionary writing, in fact, had a more contradictory location within the field of colonial representations. In what ways did the stock and evocative metaphors and routine and emotive images with structured missionary thought and inscription constitute a part of and reinforce the powerful cultural idioms of domination that were invested in by western communities? Moreover, the rhetoric of missionaries often reveals a tacit support for British rule. This was, once again, not the function of a seamless community of colonial interests made up of metropole policy makers, provincial practitioners, local administrators, members of the armed forces and missionaries. We need to turn instead to the tangled web of relations between the principles of missiology, the structure of Protestant beliefs, and the

policies of British administrators. In brief, there seems to have been a tie up between two sets of processes: the missionaries stated commitment to the complementarity of the Church and the state, of spiritual and temporal power, and the post-mutiny policy of British administration to effect a separation between religion and politics which critically augmented colonial power. Finally, the missionaries invoked the precept of individual self-determination and the spiritually spectacular moment of the witnessing of Christ to argue for the religious freedom of the convert. At the same time, these converts were childlike and struggling to grasp rational objective thought. They had to be guided, nurtured and controlled within a paternalist enterprise. The missionaries, seem to have participated, wittingly and unwittingly, in the construction of colonial mythologies of racial supremacy, the establishment of structures of paternalist authority and the reinforcement of the legitimacy of colonial rule. All this came about without their formal entry into the manifest processes of institutionalised power relations centering on the colonial state. It is indeed the realms of the cultural, the ideological and the discursive which reveal the political implications and colonial connections of the mission project.

The missionaries along with other white settlers were agents in the creations of colonial cultures of rule. These cultures, Ann Stoler has argued, were not direct translations of European society planted in the colonies, but 'unique cultural configurations, home spun creations in which European food, dress, housing and morality were given new political meanings in the particular social order of colonial rule.'¹² A close attention to the cultural forms borne and initiated by the mission project allows an exploration of two simultaneous processes. The missionaries participated in the new constructions of 'westernness', embedded in distinct lifestyles, within the colonial order.¹³ This involved the conscious creation and fashioning of the boundaries of the 'community' of white settlers, which served simultaneously to overcome their internal economic and social differences and disparities. At the same time, the missionary was also committed, as a part of the evangelical deal, to civilise the converts through the initiation of a set of key practices revolving around building, clothes, writing and the printed word. Similarly, the spatial organisation of activities in the mission station, governed by western divisions and notations of time was, perhaps, a part of the attempt of early evangelists to rationalise the indigenous groups through the geometric grid of civilization.¹⁴ It was arguably within the interstices of these contradictory movement—the constitution of distinct life styles in a new context as a measure of

the distance from local cultures and the use of many of the signs of western culture to civilise the heathen—that the missionary constructed a sense of belonging to a community of white settlers and reinforced the schemes of power which anchored the familiar symbols and signs of the cultural order of colonial rule.

The authority of the missionary was closely intertwined with the 'arts of civilisation' initiated by the mission project. It was within the matrix of local cultures that the missionaries were fashioned as *sahebs*.¹⁵ The mission buildings and the spatial organisation of work were impregnated in the everyday definition and reinforcement of missionary authority, the *saheb* who owned and regulated the fields, the (occasional) forest and the mission station that were placed at masterly discretion within his well defined domain. The missionary healed bodies through western medicine. Similarly, he controlled the production of the printed word. This needs to be set in the context of the importance which Protestantism attached to the convert self-commitment to the 'word' and the 'book' as the signs of a true Christian and of the power of writing within an oral tradition. The ability to inscribe and to engender print then served to underwrite missionary authority. Finally, the missionary stood centre stage in the play of the normative discourse and practices about decency, modesty and shame. Clothes became a distinctive sign of indigenous Christianity. Contemporary missionary accounts and photographs of converts from the late nineteenth century reveal men wearing payjamas and shirts, women clad in blouses and proper sarees—instead of *ludgas* (half sarees)—and little girls in long dresses. The acquisition of canvas shoes added to the dignity and bearing of catechists and school teachers. The accent was on decency. Modesty covered bodies and countered shame. The gains for the converts were simultaneously material and symbolic and they constructed their own understanding of missionary authority. A report from the early twentieth century, for instance, pilloried a Chamar convert who refused to do a menial job in the village on the grounds that as a Christian he had become a *saheb*, a member of the master race. This was of course only one of the several ways in which the key social practices introduced by the mission project were appropriated and deployed by the community of converts. We need to explore the ways in which the Book and the Word, Christian divinities and the 'holy family', saints and martyrs, western notations of time and the spatial organisation of work, and clothes and buildings were understood, refashioned and set to work in the modes of worship and practices of convert communities.

What was the nature of convert communities that developed in Chhattisgarh? The pattern of conversions in the region did not follow the missionaries millenarian master plan of mass movements. A few conversions came about as individuals survived prolonged illnesses which had brought them close to death. The missionary accounts were unambiguous: it was the healing powers of the Lord which had compelled these people to convert to Christianity. It was, in fact, ties of kinship that proved critical to the growth of the Christian congregations in Chhattisgarh. The missionaries saw the process as the internal growth of Christianity. Ties of kinship and bonds of affinity were clearly natural. They were also seen as a check on the materialist instincts of the converts.

The constraints of men and money of early missionary endeavour meant that they were compelled to establish Christian villages. The converts became a part of the paternalist economy which developed around the missionary and the mission station. The mission employed the converts as coolies and servants and each household, after it had shown the necessary qualities of thrift, was granted four acres of land. The converts who completed the course at the training schools run by missionaries were employed as catechists, teachers in village schools and as scripture readers. The missionaries trained the converts as masons, smiths and carpenters and employed many of them at the mission station. The women converts were engaged as servants and a little later employed as bible-women. The situation of the converts at these mission stations was much better than what they had faced as cultivators in their villages. They received loans at low rates of interest and the missionary, unlike other *malguzars*, did not exact *begar* (forced labour) but paid them for labour on public works. The missionary was the *malguzar*, the owner proprietor, of these Christian villages. The master of the mission station combined the powers of the *malguzar* and the pastor: the provision of employment and aid to converts was accompanied by a drive to control and discipline the members of the congregation. The division between state and church, temporal and spiritual power, became blurred and got lost.

A series of questions crop up. I raise them as a first step to articulate the themes embedded within the evangelical encounter. Were individual conversions prompted by an apprehension that the regenerative powers of missionary medicine and Christ-the-Saviour embodied greater efficacy than the healing powers of Hindu deities and local specialists? What were the links between principles of kinship—agnatic ties and affinal values—the mechanisms of ostracism

of caste and sect and the growth in conversions? What were the frames of reference through which the missionary participated, as hapless victim and active agent, in the subversion of an inviolable principle of Protestant theology? Did not this blurring of the distinction between spiritual and temporal power fit well with the political sociology of the converts which was, arguably, based upon a notion of indissoluble links between religion and power? How was the missionary as *malguzar* and pastor of a village located by converts and other members of the local population within structures of authority in which the ritual hierarchy of caste society—that emphasised the concerns of purity and pollution—and the principles of a ritually and culturally constituted dominant caste worked together and reinforced each other as mutually defining axes of relations of power? How did all this tie in with the colonial project of the separation of religion and politics? Finally, what were the contours of convert deference—which involved both necessary self-preservation and an extraction of whatever was up for grabs—to the missionary who they fashioned as *ma-bap*?

This pattern of differential perceptions and occasional double binds extended to the converts and their communities. The missionary in consultation with the local leaders among the converts often defined regulations to order the life of the congregations. Under the new rules the indigenous congregations retained the concern with norms of purity and pollution and were expected to shun all substances and practices which would be viewed with disfavour by the local population. Moreover, the principles of endogamy—were reinforced through an insistence on ritual feasts to the extended kin and affinal group and members of the community to signify the sanctity of marriage. Finally, the constitution of the church council was fashioned along the lines of the *jat panchayat* with its *sayan* (old/wise men) and relied on the mechanism of excommunication, which characteristically 'outcasted' the members who transgressed the norms of the community. It is necessary to explore in this context the continuities—particularly when viewed through the filter of local cultures—between these new regulations and the rules of caste and sect and the institutions of village life; and, as a corollary, to examine the ways in which the rules and institutions set up to govern the life of indigenous congregations came to be rearranged and acquire new meanings in the relocated communities. At the same time, the converts also subverted the regulations laid down by the missionaries. In Protestant ideology marriage, for instance, was a sacred contract between individuals and the monogamous household was the basic unit for the conduct of a

Christian life. For civilisation to flourish 'the holy family of the Christian cosmos' had to triumph over the moral murk, sloth and chaos of the heathen world.¹⁶ The missionaries concern with monogamy and their fear of adultery, a snare and trap of Satan, meant that the converts were forbidden the practice of *churi* or secondary marriages.¹⁷ However, this was a critical arena in which the converts exercised considerable initiative and consistently challenged missionary authority to form what their masters designated as 'adulterous' relationships of secondary marriages. They also drew upon injunctions against adultery as sin and the principles of boundary maintenance tied to rules of caste and sect to turn the honour of women into an evocative metaphor for order within the community and a symbol that constituted its boundary. The converts defied missionary logic in fashioning their understanding of marriage and sexual transgression.¹⁸ They did not replicate the institutions and practices of a 'modernised' social order in the image of missionary masters and had their own uses for the 'truth' offered by the missionaries. The missionaries, often unwittingly, participated in the creation of indigenous Christianity.

The wresting of the initiative from the missionaries was also played out in the ideas, presentation of arguments and practices of 'native' catechists and mission workers. These are revealed to us with particular clarity in the day-books of mission workers. The day-books were detailed reports written by the catechists for the missionaries which recorded their day to day trips to villages and bazaars. They exist in manuscript form and roughly cover the period from 1908 to 1914. The catechists' modes of argument, at first sight, seem overlaid by a strategy of closure. Each time, at every step, the dedicated workers of the mission clinch an argument from their religious-ideological adversaries in the name and through the 'truth' of 'Christ'. At the same time, the day-books also direct us towards three interrelated sets of issues. First, they allow an exploration of the prosecution of itinerant practices of proselytisation and the preaching of Christ as it traced its path and wound its way within the everyday rhythms of life, of labour, of leisure in village society in Chhattisgarh. Second, the catechists' modes of argument—the what and the how of that which they said—as they coped with familiar and ingenious queries and arguments reveal a rearrangement, amounting at times to an alternative articulation, of Christian doctrines which was closely bound to their novel constructions of the divinities, beliefs and rituals of indigenous faiths. Finally, in the day-books a distinct mode of writing—certain of 'truth', uncertain of language, which closes in on itself—reveals the glimmers of a fluid

world of popular religious discourse in which the meaning of a new faith were debated and contested through a reiteration and reinterpretation of the familiar and the old.

The interplay between the old and the new was a critical component of the cultural interface between orality and writing—often interpenetrating but distinct modes of ordering the world—that lay at the heart of the evangelical encounter. The missionaries and converts participated in a play of different textualities, of oral narratives and written texts, which reordered myths and legend-histories. The converts worked upon their myths to forge connections between gurus and gods and missionaries and Christ within their oral traditions; the missionaries seized upon and reordered these myths to construct alternative histories, contending pasts. The two processes fed each other. In the 1930s the pooled resources of the convert and the missionary were to result in an authoritative account of Satnampanth situated on the axis of the inexorable logic of the truth of Christ: a missionary's last bid to secure a metamorphosis and mass conversion of the Satnamis through their witnessing of the Saviour. The authority of the account, significantly, derived both from its engagement with the forms and idiom of popular religious discourse, grounded in an oral tradition, which provided evangelism with a creative force and its inscription of myths, beliefs, and legends, the fixing and systematisation of meaning which lent them authenticity.¹⁹ The complex social relationship between the written and the spoken word extended to the cultural encounter between different modes of reading of texts. I have raised the questions of the symbolic power of writing within an oral tradition and the possible ways in which the scriptures were apprehended and appropriated by convert communities. It is worth asking if the missionary gift of writing to the converts allowed them to construct a reading of the Bible in which the Protestant emphasis on the convert self-commitment to—and the internalisation of—the 'word' entered a creative tension with a contending notion, rooted within indigenous schemes, of texts as magical, instrumental 'whose reading had a purpose outside themselves because they [were] efficacious.'²⁰ These are only two examples from a larger process of the retention, subversion and fashioning of meanings that lay at the heart of the relationship between morality and writing and between different modes of reading of texts embedded within the evangelical encounter.

The convert refraction of the missionary message through the lens of indigenous categories underlay their uses of Christianity and

interrogation of missionary authority. In the 1930s the converts of a mission station, Bismampur, responded to missionary efforts to foster a self-dependent congregation infused with the ideas and principles of Christian charity and brotherhood by defending the paternalist ties which had bonded them to the missionaries, asserting their self-dependence and setting up an independent Church. The converts seized the Christian signs of civilisation and elements of missionary rhetoric and reworked them into their practice: their questioning of the missionaries—with its accent on truth and legality, faith and civilization—was constructed in the idiom and language of evangelical Christianity. The drama, was short-lived; the context persisted.²¹ There were of course other actors in different plays with varied contestatory scripts.

In the period between 1920 and 1955 the missionaries and the mission project were forced to engage with organisations and positions articulated in the domain of institutionalised politics. What emerged was a complex matrix of relationships between the missionaries, convert communities, the Hindu proselytising venture of the Arya Samaj, nationalist politics and reform initiatives sponsored by caste organisations such as the Satnami Mahasabha and the Kanaujia Sabha. The initiative of a lone mission worker, for instance, helped in the creation of Satnam Path Pradarshak Sabha which sought to combine principles of Christianity with a programme to reform the Satnamis and went on to challenge the dominant leaders of the community. In 1936 a group of Satnamis in the village of Tumgaon in Raipur got together with, M.D. Singh, a catechist of the American Evangelical Mission, to set up the Shri Path Pradarshak Samaj (Society of the Light of the True Path).²² The authoritative presence of M.D. Singh, who was accorded the title of *acharya* (teacher), meant that in its initial stages the Shri Path Pradarshak Sabha worked closely with the ideas and tenets of Christianity: the vows that members had to take included the acceptance of 'only that Scripture which teaches the true name Satnam' (the Bible) and a pledge against committing adultery; equally, the constitution of the Sabha opened with a Biblical verse, 'The bush continues to burn but does not become consumed' (*Exodus* 3:2).²³ M.D. Singh soon lost the initiative. The overwhelming emphasis of the initiative came to centre on a drive to get the Satnamis recognised as Hindus. The efforts of the obscure catechist had, however, led to the creation of a rival to the Satnami Mahasabha, the dominant organisational initiative to reform the Satnamis and to negotiate the emergent constitutional politics in the region whose working was cast

in the idiom of law and command.²⁴ Moreover, the period witnessed the drawing up of new boundaries and changes in the relationship between converts and castes and sects in an altered political context. Finally, the friction, tension and conflict of these decades underlay a dramatic episode. In 1956 an important missionary cultural centre was burnt down in the city of Raipur: the detailed reports of the incident reveal the contours of a nationalist project aligned to upper caste Hinduism, its constructions of alienness and its uses of *swaraj*. The Indian Church in Chhattisgarh ended as an unhappy paradox: its indigenous features anathema to the missionaries; and its colonial connections derided by the local Hindu population.

Conclusion

I will by way of a conclusion set out how this study of the evangelical encounter engages with a range of key concerns in anthropology, sociology and history. Recent studies of colonialism and Christianity have focused on the construction of colonial cultures of rule,²⁵ the relationship between colonial power and language and discursive practices,²⁶ and the place of implicit meanings of everyday practices and the symbols and metaphors of western civilization in the articulation of Christianity in colonial contexts.²⁷ The focus on the ambiguous and often contradictory location of the missionaries and the mission project in the making of the cultural order of colonial rule in Chhattisgarh brings together these diverse but inter-linked emphases and sets them to work in a new social and historical context.

A recognition of the shared past of the evangelical entanglement—situated in a mutual dialogue between ethnography, history and cultural studies—reveals a wide ranging play of differential perceptions and multiple appropriations. This involved the joint energies of missionaries and converts, of colonisers and colonised: the fashioning of meanings of 'conversion' and the construction of identities and of 'indigenous Christianity';²⁸ the cultural interface between orality and writing and between different modes of reading of texts;²⁹ the complex relationship between myth and history;³⁰ the making of traditions and the uses of the past as a negotiable and remarkable resource;³¹ and the simultaneous constitution of anthropological objects and the meanings and truths of colonised subjects.³² The missionaries could lose the initiative, their endeavours tamed by native perceptions;³³ the agency of converts and indigenous groups could be inextricably bound to relationships of domination, their practices and idioms of

context contingent upon symbols of power and the refraction of authoritative messages through the filter of local categories.³⁴ Truly the evangelical encounter in Chhattisgarh has wide implications.

Finally, the prism of Christianity in Chhattisgarh helps to re-examine influential theories of religion and power in South Asia. Anthropologists and historians tend to conceive of caste and sect as binary categories. This is a legacy of a dominant model which is based upon a Brahman householder's construction of renunciation and asceticism.³⁵ It ignores the perspectives of the ascetic and the non-twice-born caste and has little place for the permeable boundaries of the householder and renouncer and the interpenetration, in practice, of principles of caste and sect.³⁶ The focus on the continuities between rules of caste and sect and the mechanisms of ostracism and incorporation, the concerns of purity and pollution and the principles of kinship, marriage and boundary maintenance within indigenous congregations aids the reformulation of the relationship between the two categories. Similarly a vastly influential statement of the nature of caste society in South Asian encompasses power within the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution and renders it epiphenomenal.³⁷ More recent exercises open up possibilities for wider discussions of dominance but tend to locate power, almost exclusively, in constructs of ritually and culturally constituted kingship and dominant caste.³⁸ At the same time, the perspective of groups who embodied a low ritual status and their exclusion from the web of relationships with service castes suggests the ritual hierarchy of purity and pollution—charged with meanings grounded in power—worked in tandem with a culturally, ritually and ideologically constituted kingship and dominant caste to secure the subordination of low caste and untouchable communities.³⁹ A recognition of the tie up between these axes of dominance within caste society and the symbols and metaphors of colonial power has considerable significance for the discussion of the articulation of Christianity and caste in Chhattisgarh because of the overwhelming presence of untouchable groups and low castes among Christian converts in the region. These are two examples. There is much more to the picture. Can a story of the evangelical encounter in colonial Chhattisgarh engage with and extend concepts of personhood, identity, ritual and the body in South Asia? Perhaps. Certainly? The interplay between meaning and power, a bit like John Brown's soul, marches on.

NOTES

1. The arguments in this paper are based primarily on field work and the records of the German Evangelical Mission Society—later the American Evangelical Mission—which are housed in the Eden Archives and Library, Webster Groves, Missouri. These records include: the annual reports of the missionaries by name of station and missionary, 1868-83 (bound volume), 1883-1956; quarterly reports of missionaries by name of station and missionary, 1905-56; Baptismal register, Bistrampur, 1870-95; reports on the Malguzari of Christian villages; manuscript histories of the mission and mission stations; manuscript biographies and autobiographies of missionaries; catechist's diaries; collections of private papers of missionaries; files on the burning of the Gass Memorial [cultural] Centre; hymn books and pedagogic literature; three missionary periodicals and papers—*der Deutsche Missionsfreund* (1866-1908), *der Freundensbote*, the *Evangelical Herald* (St. Louis)—and several tracts and histories written for the converts, the local population and an audience in the United States. The records are in English, German, Hindi and Chhattisgarhi. I thank Ishita Banerjee for translating the German sources. All other translations from Hindi and Chhattisgarhi are mine. The archival and field work on which this paper is based was made possible by grants-in-aid of research from the Association of Commonwealth Universities, London and from the Bethune-Baker Fund, the Cambridge Historical Society, Churchill College, the Lighfoot Grant, the Smuts Memorial Fund and the Worts Travelling Scholar's Fund, all at Cambridge.
2. Juhnke; Lapp; Lohr; Seybold; Tanner.
3. Forrester; Manor; Oddie; Whitehead.
4. Bayly; also see Stirrat.
5. There are indeed very few exceptions: Hudson; Eaton; Scott.
6. Asad; Beidelman; Comaroff; Comaroff and Comaroff; Mignolo; Nash; Prins; Rosaldo; Roseberry; Sahlins; Scott, 1992; Stoler, 1985 and 1989; Taussig, 1980 and 1987; Thomas, 1991 and 1992.
7. Satnampanth was initiated in the early nineteenth century, around 1820, by Ghasidas, a farm servant, primarily among the Chamars of Chhattisgarh. The Chamars, who collectively embodied the stigma of death pollution of the sacred cow, constituted a significant proportion—a little less than one sixth—of the population of Chhattisgarh. They either owned land or were share-croppers and farm servants. The Chamars and a few hundred members of other castes—largely Telis (oil-pressers) and Rawats (graziers)—who joined Satnampanth became Satnamis. They had to abstain from meat, liquor, tobacco, certain vegetables—tomatoes, chillies, aubergines—and red pulses. Satnampanth rejected the deities and idols of the Hindu pantheon and had no temples. The members were asked to believe only in a formless god, *satnam* (true name). There were to be no distinctions of caste within Satnampanth. With Ghasidas began a guru *parampara* (tradition) which was hereditary. Satnampanth developed a stock of myths, rituals and practices which were associated with the gurus. I construct a history of the Satnamis in my 'Religion, Identity and Authority among the Satnamis in Colonial Central India', Ph. D. dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1992. The study locates the group within the changing relations of power in the region, traces the different efforts to regulate the internally differentiated community, and discusses the ways in which the Satnamis drew

upon symbols of authority to negotiate, question and context their subordination. The account stands at the intersection of history and anthropology and combines archival and field-work to address a range of key and inextricably bound relationships—between myth and history, orality and writing, gender and order, reform and authority, religion and power, contestatory practices and domination, community and hegemony, and caste and sect—indexed by the Satnami past. Dube, n.d.

8. Prins; Sahlins, 1985.
9. *Der Freundensbote*, 79, 20, 1928, pp. 309-15.
10. Dube, forthcoming (b).
11. Comaroff and Comaroff.
12. Stoler, 1989.
13. For details see Dube, 1992 (b).
14. Comaroff and Comaroff.
15. A longer treatment of the themes discussed in the next three paragraphs is contained in Dube, forthcoming (b).
16. Comaroff and Comaroff.
17. *Churi* has been widely prevalent form of remarriage among all but the highest castes—Brahmans, Rajputs and Baniyas—in Chhattisgarh. Under the *churi* form of marriage a married woman could marry another man if he gave her *churis* (bangles). While the broad pattern was similar, specific customs regarding *churi* varied across castes. In general the matter of *churi* was deliberated by the *jal sayan* or *panchayat*: they fixed a certain *behatri* (compensation) which the new husband had to pay to the earlier husband and his family. The new husband also had to give a feast to the other members of the caste—the number was decided by the caste elders in the village—which symbolised the incorporation of the woman into his home and the acceptance of the marriage by the community. The earlier husband, on the other hand, had to feed fellow caste people within the village in the form of a *marti jeeli bhat* which symbolised that the woman was dead to him. Dube, 1993.
18. Dube, forthcoming (b).
19. A detailed discussion of these themes is contained in Dube, n.d., see also Dube, 1992 (a).
20. Ramanujan
21. An extended discussion of this case is contained in Dube, forthcoming (b).
22. M.P. Davis, 'A modern Satnami tragedy', (typescript), 1942, p. 1 Folder on Satnamis, M.P. Davis Papers, Eden Archives and Library, Webster Groves, Missouri.
23. *ibid.*, p. 2.
24. Dube, forthcoming (a).
25. Callaway; Kennedy; Stoler, 1989.
26. Fabian; Mani; Scott, 1992; Stoler, 1985; Thomas, 1992.
27. Comaroff; Comaroff and Comaroff; Mignolo.
28. Comaroff; Comaroff and Comaroff; Nash; Taussig, 1980; Thomas, 1991.
29. Mignolo; Ong, 1977 and 1982; Ossio; Prakash, 1900 and 1991; Ramanujan, 1991; Schaeffer; Taussig, 1987.
30. Dube, 1992 (a); Hill; Obeyesekere; Ossio.
31. Borofsky, 1987; Herzfeld, 1991.
32. Borofsky; Comaroff; Rosaldo; Scott, 1992; Taussig, 1980; Thomas, 1991.

33. Prins.
34. Dube, n.d.; Guha, 1982-89; Haynes and Prakash, 1991; Scott, 1985.
35. Dumont, 1970 (b).
36. Burghart; Dube, 1993; Dube, n.d.; Van der veer.
37. Dumont, 1970 (a).
38. Dirks, 1987 and 1989; Raheja, 1988.
39. Dube, 1993.

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