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Recast(e)ing Identity: Transformation of Inter-caste Relationships in Post-colonial Rural Orissa

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I. Introduction

Beyond 'hierarchy', 'substantialization' and 'kingship centred' view on caste

Caste in contemporary Indian society has often been seen as a remainder of waning tradition. Advent of egalitarian liberalism and/or capitalism is taken to be the force of change which is destroying or restricting the relevance of caste in contemporary society. Against such a view, this paper will argue that caste remains an important frame of reference for defining people's identity especially in rural society. In particular, I would like to discuss the role of people's agency in the reshaping of caste in contemporary rural Orissa. It is the aggregate efforts of different groups of people in local situations to constantly redefine the form and meaning of caste that maintains its relevance. I feel this aspect has been neglected in many previous theories, which have tended to consider caste concerns merely in terms of the presence or absence of 'hierarchy' or in terms of 'substantialized' group formations.

Dumont, for example, argues that there has been a process of 'substantialisation', where 'structure seems to yield to substance' [Dumont 1980: 226] and castes start to compete against each other as entities for higher socio-economic status. What he means by this is that castes are no longer embedded in the hierarchical structure but acts as an independent and substantialized units against each other. Dumont adds that 'one must not lose sight of the fact that this alleged modification, however genuine it may be, remains incomplete. It bears on the politico-economic domain of social life' [Dumont 1980: 227]. For Dumont, the overall hierarchical structure of caste remains

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unchanged because 'the politico-economic domain is encompassed in an overall religious setting' [Dumont 1980: 228].

This formulation by Dumont, which serves to protect his structural model on caste, is now criticized by many scholars, including Fuller who points out the existence of 'ostensibly contradictory evidence emerging from modern change' [Fuller 1996: 12]. Indeed, Dumont's thesis on the unaffected continuity of the encompassing structure of caste hierarchy seems untenable today. Fuller suggests instead that there is 'above all a denial, most explicitly in the public domain of the existence or continuing significance of caste in its "traditional form"'. This means that the hierarchy and inequality of caste is denied in public, though there is 'substantialist assertion about cultural distinctiveness' between castes [Fuller 1996: 21].

What Fuller means by 'substantialist assertion' is that each caste legitimizes caste endogamy and caste-specific habits regarding food and clothing not in terms of caste hierarchy or principles of purity-pollution but in terms of cultural differences between castes. Caste here is talked about as if it is a substantialized and distinct 'community' with a specific culture. He further argues that there continues to be 'relational hierarchical values', that is considerations related to purity and pollution, which 'remain salient in the private, domestic domain even though they have been displaced by substantialist ones in the public domain' [Fuller 1996: 13]. In sum, Fuller argues that there continues to be 'traditional' caste hierarchy in the private domain whereas in the public domain it is replaced by 'substantialized' caste discourse and practice. This kind of understanding presupposes that the advent of liberal egalitarianism transformed the traditional structure of caste hierarchy into a substantialist form in the public domain but had no effect in the private domain where such modern influence can still be evaded.

Fuller's description of contemporary caste practices, as I will demonstrate below with my own data, has merit but it remains unsatisfactory. Firstly, he considers the outside (or imported) force of egalitarianism as the cause of social change and fails to acknowledge agency of local people. Secondly, he fails to deal with the present-day inter-caste exchange at the local community level, which cannot be reduced to either a 'substantialized' caste practice in the public domain or a continuity of 'traditional caste hierarchy' in the private domain. I will show that there continues to be selective caste-based exchanges and division of labour that are important in Orissa. Caste-based relations have been reformulated and given new

meanings in local situations where they form the basis of people's identity.

It is in this context that the neo-Hocartian understanding of caste throws a new light. Recently, there have been attempts by several influential scholars to redefine caste as 'sacrificial organization' [Dirks 1987; Raheja 1988; Quigley 1993]. These theories were developed in opposition to Dumont's Brahmanical model of caste hierarchy and enveloped a rehabilitation of Hocart's theory of caste where sacrifice plays the central role. I argue that local caste practices should also be understood as having sacrificial significance, but differ from the neo-Hocartians in one important respect. Their principal concern was to understand the cultural and cosmological importance of kingship and dominance in Indian society and they have a tendency to reduce the meaning of sacrifice to its political or power-related aspect. As a consequence, when caste is defined as a sacrificial organization, its meaning is often reduced to its significance as part of the structure of kingship and dominance. For instance, in Dirks' work on a pre-colonial little kingdom, caste is understood as being centred around the king, as all castes are seen to be positioned in relation to the king [Dirks 1987]. Raheja carefully deals with multiple configurations of caste, but when she talks of the 'centrality' configuration of caste she refers to the centre-periphery structure of dominance in the village society [Raheja 1988]. Quigley also focuses on the king's centrality in the caste system but one that is modified by kinship. He also says that each caste attempts to emulate the centre-periphery organization of the king's court [Quigley 1993].

Against these views, I will show that the meaning of sacrifice in India, and its influence on Indian society, has a richness and breadth that includes but also goes beyond kingship and dominance. Kingship and dominance can be usefully interpreted in terms of sacrifice but the reverse does not hold: sacrifice cannot just be interpreted in terms of, and thereby reduced to, matters of kingship and dominance.

In this paper, I attempt to provide an understanding of caste as sacrificial organization paying attention to its more encompassing semantics. As caste phenomena are fragmented today and have different forms and meaning in different spheres, I try to contextualize each of them in contemporary socio-political settings and explain their meaning with reference to dominant ideational frameworks. Today, the practice of caste as sacrificial organization is limited mainly to the ritual sphere. I consider the significance of sacrifice in the

contemporary socio-political context and analyse its transformation paying attention to the role of village people's agency.

Jajmani exchange, market economy and caste as ritual organization

The kind of caste-based exchange, which I will attempt to highlight in this paper, has often been discussed in terms of jajmani relations, though unsatisfactorily. Many researchers have noted the contemporary waning of jajmani relations in the advent of the market economy.[1] Here again, the force of change is seen as coming from outside the locality, and there is a neglect of the role of people's agency in the process.

What I would like to pay attention to here is the fact that there seems to be a reformulated continuity of caste-based relations in ritual spheres. As I attempt to show in the following, this is not a mere residue of the modern advance of capitalism, but a field of exchange that is consciously selected and maintained by people. In other words, these caste-based exchanges in the ritual sphere have remained as a result of the agency of the people in the locality. The caste-based division of labour and exchange in local society has gone through many transformations over time and we can note the agency of different groups of people in the locality at work behind such changes.

It is important to note that the meaning of caste in this ritual sphere has changed from a purity-oriented hierarchy to one where idiom of sacrificial cooperation is expressed in terms of 'duty' (*kartabya*) and 'service' (*sebā*) to the community and the local deities. It seems to me that there has been a development of emphasis on 'solidarity' and 'cooperation' aspects of caste that attempts to get away from, or at least underplay, the purity-centred hierarchy and the power-structure of dominance. What is interesting is that putting less importance to hierarchical and power aspects of caste has not meant that the people necessarily opted for individual liberalism in every sphere, in spite of the fact that individual liberalism is often taken to be *the* modern alternative in the official and urban discourse. Caste-based jajmani exchanges have been abolished in the non-ritual, economic sphere where the practice of market exchange has taken over; but what is seen as religio-ritual duty of castes has remained

[1] For review and criticism on 'jajmani system', see Fuller 1977, 1989 and Mayer 1993.

till today. Moreover, the duty of castes in community rituals has been maintained. These caste-based relations and cooperation in the ritual sphere have continued with reformulated forms and meaning as a result of contested negotiation of different groups of villagers. Here, we can see both the aspect of adaptability and dynamic changes on the one hand and the robust durability and continued importance of caste at the local level.

Cultural politics of caste identity in post-colonial India

The reformulated continuity of caste-based exchange in the ritual sphere is related to the cultural politics of identity formation in post-colonial India. The ritual sphere continues to be the domain in which the local people in rural Orissa today form and express their 'traditional' identity.

In this vein, I think it is useful to refer to the framework of inner and outer domains suggested by Partha Chatterjee [Chatterjee 1993]. Chatterjee's framework, originally used to point out the dichotomous structure of Janus-faced Indian nationalism, can be utilized to describe the dual existence of the official outer sphere where caste hierarchy is denied, and the non-official yet locally legitimate inner ritual sphere where caste is given an important role. I am not saying, of course, that a simplistic outer/inner dichotomy can adequately describe the complexity of the situation in which caste is placed today. However, the kind of dichotomous consciousness pointed out by Chatterjee is helpful in understanding the significance of inner community tradition in the locality that has a very important and legitimate place in colonial and post-colonial India.[2]

I would argue that the dilemma of identity formation based on dichotomous consciousness can be observed not only among the nationalist elites described by Chatterjee but also among the subordinated. It can be observed that the lower castes in today's rural Orissa have

[2] Regarding Chatterjee's framework, it has been rightly pointed out that it is biased towards the urban, high caste, male Bengali and despite his concern for the 'subaltern', the experiences and agency of the subordinated are marginalized [e.g. Visweswaran 1996, Menon 1997]. Furthermore, his work has concentrated upon the 'nationalist' imagination, and not enough attention has been paid to the other kinds of imagination that value non-national—regional, ethnic, religious, gender, caste—community identities. In spite of these shortcomings in Chatterjee's work, I think his framework is useful nonetheless in pointing to the fragmented, dichotomous consciousness in relation to the people's notion of self.

been making constant efforts to reconstruct the basis of who they are with reference to their past and present.[3] They attempt to secure a better and more dignified position within the local community tradition as long as they live there. This is done not only with reference to the outer ideal of liberal civil society. It also involves the reformulation of the inner community domain of tradition, including caste-based division of labour, in which there are contested negotiation with attempts of dominance and resistance among groups of local people. It is important to re-emphasize in this regard that this caste-based division of labour observable today is not merely some kind of remnant of past practices which is yet to fade away. It is indeed a product of historical reconstruction made through contested negotiations by the local people.

Caste remains an important frame of reference for defining 'traditional' identity for Oriya villagers including the lower castes. For the villagers, 'tradition' is not a mere abstraction or conceptual imagination, but what they actually practice in the place where they live. What matters to the villagers is not defining what 'Hindu' or 'Indian' tradition is, which is a concern for nationalists, but to redefine who they are in reference to the traditional practices in their local habitat. Traditional practices here do not refer to a set of age-old, unchanging customs, but to those practices which are considered to provide existential meaning and sense of who they are in the locality. The form and meaning of traditional practices certainly change in history, but nonetheless provide the people with a sense of identity in reference to their past and present. Practices related to lineage and caste unarguably remain the most important frame of reference for people's identity in local society in contemporary Orissa.

In the process of reformulation of inter-caste relationships, we can observe agency of multiple groups of people at work including high and low castes. The process of remaking tradition for the villagers has been quite different from the literary imaginations taken up in the works of Chatterjee for example, since it involved direct negotiations between agents placed in power relations. Each attempted to negotiate their position in order to secure their honourable identity by gradually

[3] In this regard, Dilip Menon is correct in pointing out the 'existential dilemma' of lower castes who would only be subordinated or outcaste in 'Hindu tradition' [Menon 1997]. However, he does not seem to pay enough attention to their agency in reformulating and redefining the contents and forms of 'their' tradition in which they see themselves as a part.

shifting practices and their interpretations. By paying attention to how caste-based exchanges and division of labour have been reformulated and given new meanings through the agency of different groups of villagers in Orissa, I would like to throw light upon the unofficial yet legitimate space given to caste whose form and meaning have been negotiated and renegotiated in history and continue to be so today.

II. Caste in the Past and the Present

Transformation of caste in local society

Before we can go on to see the process of change in inter-caste relationship, we must first look at from what it has changed. It is now unnecessary to repeat the argument that the kind of caste hierarchy based on the principle of purity and pollution described in the ethnographies of 1960s and 1970s and theorized by Dumont cannot be seen as the timeless traditional structure of Indian society. As Bayly has described, the ideology of Brahmanism and high Hindu kingship gradually increased its influence through the eighteenth century, though there were 'other powerful ideologies working against hierarchy and rigid caste boundaries' [C. Bayly 1988: 156]. It was only under colonialism in the nineteenth century that the hierarchical value and ritual distinctions became more pervasive and prominent features of caste [Fuller 1996; S. Bayly 1999]. Caste took a particularly rigid form in conjunction with colonial institution and discourse as Dirks has pointed out [Dirks 1987, 2001].

Concomitantly with this change, inter-caste relationships and exchanges at the level of local community were transformed through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the pre-colonial 'system of entitlements', members in a local community were granted various rights to shares of the local products and the royal and/or community honours and privileges in lieu of performing different duties and functions for the reproduction of the state and community [Tanabe 1998, 1999a, forthcoming].[4]

This system of entitlements was broken down with the advent of colonial administration and a new kind of 'monistic caste hierarchy'

[4] The existence of such systems, same in principle but in different forms, is reported also in the case of pre-colonial West and South India. Kotani has called it the *vatan* system while Mizushima has called it the *mirasi* system [Mizushima 1996, forthcoming; Kotani 1996, 2002].

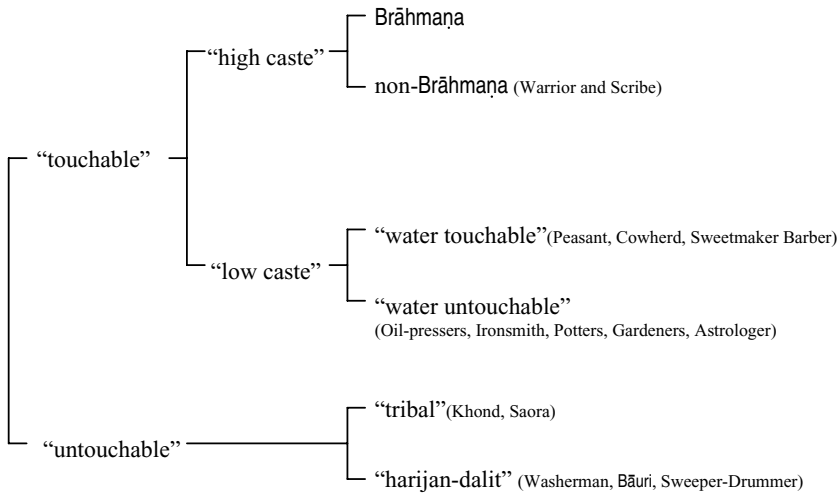

Diagram 1: Representational model of caste classification in Khurda, Orissa

Note: The caste names in brackets are examples from Garh Manitri.

emerged under colonialism, where the ritualistic Brahmanical caste hierarchy more or less matched the socio-economic hierarchy.[5] Although this monistic caste hierarchy underwent further changes with the development of commercialization of agriculture, the image of monistic caste hierarchy has remained as the 'traditional' model of Indian society and is put in contradistinction to the modern state and market which are seen as being characterized by flux and dynamism. It is often according to this image of monistic caste hierarchy, whose caste-classificatory model in ritualistic Brahmanical style is readily available in normative discourse [see Diagram 1 above], that discussions and policies regarding caste are made. However, such a model obviously by no means exhausts the realities of caste in past or present.

Since the local community as a unit of system of entitlements collapsed under colonialism, it is up to each household to negotiate the terms of exchanges with the patron households. Historical research has pointed out the differences between what anthropologists have observed as dyadic jajmani relations in the 1930s onwards and the

[5] See Tanabe [1998] for details of history of socio-economic transformation in rural Orissa.

pre-colonial 'village servant', *vatan*[6] or *mirasi* system[7], where the service castes had tenure from the local community or village and not from patron households [Fukazawa 1972, 1982, 1991; Mizushima 1996; Kotani 1996, 2002; Mayer 1993].[8] From my data in Orissa also, I have shown [Tanabe 1998] that there was a transformation from the 'system of entitlements', where the office holders had duties for and shares from the community as a whole, to the 'jajmani' style dyadic relationships of exchange between land holding households and service caste households.

In this way, what is seen as customary exchanges between patron and client households in the so-called 'jajmani system' is thus a product of colonial history where custom was reinvented after the system of entitlements broke down and each household had to become the agent as the unit of exchange. What is significant here is that in such inter-household exchanges, there are continuous negotiations regarding

[6] Kotani [1996] describes the *vatan*-system of sixteenth–eighteenth century Deccan, where membership and the division of labour in the community is defined by *vatan* (office). He explains the 'plural and stratified' character of community structure in which there was 'a complex of vertically organized community structure (village community—"*parganah* community") and horizontally organized community structure ("*jāti* community—tribes")'. Moreover, he says, 'a "*parganah*" community was connected with other "*parganah* communities" nearby, and a "*jāti* community", also, had relation with the same "*jāti* community" of the neighbouring *parganah*' [1996: 259]. He argues that village community reproduced itself within these complicated networks of community structures.

[7] Mayer [1993] distinguishes between the north Indian 'village servants' who have no property rights in service tenure and south Indian *mirasi* and *baluta* who have property rights in service tenure. In my case from Orissa, the service tenure or the office was alienable in the plains area thus resembling the *mirasi* and *baluta* system in south India, whereas, in the hilly tract areas including Garh Manitri where I conducted fieldwork, it was not alienable and thus similar to the style of north Indian 'village servants'.

[8] Fukazawa, who deals with eighteenth century Maharashtra, has argued that the service castes were servants of the whole village. He draws a distinction between the system involving these village servants and Wiser's jajmani system which involved dyadic relations between castes [Fukazawa 1972: 14–20]. He also suggests that the existence of jajmani relations in contemporary India may be a result of the village servants being transformed into family servants during the colonial period. Mizushima also argues that the so-called jajmani system was born in the colonial period in the case of south India. He says that the system of division of labour and exchange based on service towards the community as a unit was transformed into a system involving individual relations between castes or households [Mizushima 1990]. Mayer too says, from his survey of different sources of literature, that the jajmani system is a transformation of an earlier system of division of labour and exchange. He points out that the system of 'village servants' changed into a system based on jajmani relations where service castes had 'dyadic obligation to specific patron families' [Mayer 1993: 374].

the content and price of services as the outer circumstances change, and it is natural that what can be replaced by market exchanges will gradually lose their place in customary relationships.

Therefore, what is commonly seen as the erosion of the 'jajmani system' due to the effects of the market economy is really nothing other than a continuity of the working of agency of households as units of negotiation of exchange relationships. What we must do, then, is to pay attention to the 'adaptability and mutability' [Mayer 1993: 387] of the system of division of labour and exchange throughout history, paying attention to people's agency.[9]

III. The Position of Caste Today: Paradox between Liberal Egalitarianism and Reservation Policy

Idea of caste in independent India

While there has been reformulation of caste practices in the unofficial inner domain, there has been permeation of the value of equality denying importance of caste in the outer official sphere. After independence, it was one of the foremost concerns of the government to resolve the colonial dichotomy of traditional society versus the modern state, and to integrate them in a new form of nation-state. Although the tradition of national culture was to be celebrated, any traditional features in society that were seen to be incongruent with the new 'Idea of India'[10] based on principles of democracy and liberalism were considered suspect for the development of modern India.

Here, there was a clear denial of desirability of caste in the future of Indian society. Existence of caste was recognized in the constitution only in a negative sense, that is, to identify the historically discriminated group and eradicate the caste inequality through the official policy of reservation. Through this measure, the planners of

[9] Mayer points outs that 'artisans and Untouchables . . . forged out of dissolution of the old village order new economic and ritual relationships' [Mayer 1993: 389]. I think the forging of new relationships was not restricted to artisans and 'untouchables', but involved all castes in the community in the process of adapting to and finding their means of survival in new socio-political conditions. Agreements were probably made between patrons and servant castes to secure shares in the agricultural produce and get supplies of food and goods necessary for everyday living when the system of entitlements became fragmented in the colonial period.

[10] Cf. Khilnani [1999].

the constitution hoped to make Indian society caste-less, so that all the members of the nation would be able to participate in public and political life as equals.

The reservation policy that was stipulated in the constitution operates on the identification of oppressed groups based on the categories of 'Scheduled Castes' (S.C.), 'Scheduled Tribes' (S.T.) and 'Other Backward Classes' (O.B.C.). Identification of oppressed groups is done in terms of caste groups or *jāti*. In order to realize equality based on ideals of liberal democracy, India's independent government accepts the existence of caste groups—at least the oppressed ones—as a reality and conducts administration accordingly.

The reservation policy based on caste, however, contains a paradox. In one sense, it is based on a continuation of the colonial view of Indian society where caste communities, together with religious communities, were seen as parts that made up the conglomerate whole of Indian society [Dirks 2001]. It is notable that the kind of classification of caste groups they employ is almost the same as in the colonial-Brahmanical caste hierarchy model. They just label it differently. S.C. is another name for '*harijan-dalit*' castes whereas S.T. is for *ādibāsi* or tribes. Although they use the word 'class' for O.B.C., its application is based on caste classification and the category of O.B.C. in fact more or less corresponds to the category of 'low caste' in the normative representational model of caste hierarchy [see Diagram 1 above].

It is important to note that caste categories persist in public discourse, and that people are bound to act as caste members in certain contexts, though there is no official institution through which a caste can take decisions as a unit of agency. It is ironic that the reservation policy, which is supposed to take away discrimination between castes and aim at individual freedom and equality, seems to have the effect of heightening consciousness regarding caste affiliation. In the cities, people seem to have been consciously 'remembering to forget' caste divisions [Renan 1990], but V. P. Singh government's decision to implement the Mandal Commission report in 1990 arguably led people to remember caste divisions along the lines of official categorizations. This was followed by violent public demonstrations of student groups organized according to caste classification. It seems as if contradiction of the 'official' attitude has manifested on the surface: on the one hand, it is committed to the ideal of equality of individuals, but on the other hand it recognizes the reality of India as a caste society and implements policies based on caste divisions.

Avoidance of caste question in public

The official idea of equality of human beings and the spirit of denial of caste discrimination has become widespread in the outer, public sphere of India today. The commitment to the negation of caste hierarchy, in the sense of either the denial of its existence or its negative value, seems now strongly prevalent in the public sphere. Even in the village, people are careful when making decisive comments on caste matters to an outsider. If asked about caste by a stranger anthropologist, people would want to dismiss the point by saying, 'There used to be many restrictions before, but nowadays there is no more caste. People have become free'. However, this kind of talk cannot of course be taken as proof for decrease in the importance of caste. It shows only that affirming the value and existence of caste hierarchy can no longer be legitimized in the outer sphere, like the context of conversation with outside researchers, and that this kind of outer discourse has permeated to the village level.

Although it is true that the commitment to the ideal of 'castelessness' is generally accepted in the public sphere, the adherence to castelessness in practice in today's India often only means that they take care not to create situations where questions of inter-caste restrictions would arise. When they have a feast at a school in the village, for example, it is discreetly understood that a person belonging to the Brahman caste would cook so that nobody would object to eating. The caste question should not arise especially in a place like a school, which is one of the local centres for dissemination of modern liberal discourse. What is relaxed nowadays in the village public sphere is the rule of commensality in the context of a feast. On such an occasion as a feast at office or school, people of different castes would sit together to eat. This is in a way a demonstration and reconfirmation of castelessness in public. Here it is obvious that the castelessness in practice is rather limited. It is largely about avoidance of caste questions in public rather than commitment to the annihilation of caste divisions.

The meaning of caste distinction

In contrast, in the inner domain of inter-household exchanges, temple rituals, and community festivals, caste distinction is often approved and positively kept in practice. Rules regarding giving and taking of

water and food are generally observed in the interactions between the villagers in everyday circumstances (other than such public occasion as school feast). Also, most people practice caste endogamy except in rare cases of 'love marriage' (*lābh māriji*), which is still considered illicit and anti-social behaviour in rural Orissa. It should be noted that these practices that maintain caste distinction are often held not because of concerns for personal purity, since in the public domain in the town, male villagers are known, through gossip, to often relax restrictions regarding sex and food. Rather, these norms maintaining caste distinction are upheld in the non-official, though locally legitimate inner context because caste holds importance as a frame for people's identity.

This does not mean that the value of purity-oriented hierarchy largely structures social relations in rural Orissa. It must be emphasized that the 'traditional' Brahmanical value of purity and pollution or the discourse of caste hierarchy in explicit terms is employed only in a limited context. Although the religio-ritual authority of the Brahman is maintained and still important in rural Orissa, hierarchization of caste groups seems to be largely a shamefaced remainder of colonial-Brahmanical ideology which has no place except as a normative representation of 'traditional' scheme [cf. Diagram 1].

More often, caste distinction is explained in 'substantialist' terms [Fuller 1996; Mayer 1996]. The way people talk of caste distinction here is to treat caste as a device to maintain division among the 'communities' with different cultures and traditions. To explain the existence of caste restrictions regarding marriage and food, people tend to emphasize the cultural differences between castes, rather than their hierarchy. People say, for example, 'Different castes have different ways of eating, drinking, wearing clothes and doing votive rituals (*osā*, *bratā*). How can a woman from a different caste maintain the right family tradition?'[11] This is a way to avoid talking of caste hierarchy, and at the same time it firmly approves the value of caste distinctions.

[11] Mayer [1996] says, 'Villagers often justify the prohibition of inter-caste marriage by saying that the *khan-pin* (food and drink) or *rahan-sahan* (way of life) of castes is different and therefore that marriage, the most intimate and comprehensive of relations, is barred between them' [Mayer 1996: 59, Words in brackets are added by Tanabe]. This discursive and empirical situation in Ramkheri seems to be almost identical to that in Garh Manitri in 1992.

However, we must note that this kind of non-hierarchical, 'substantialized' caste practice does not necessarily lead to the kind of change from 'interdependence' to 'competition' noted by Dumont [1980: 227] for the politico-economic sphere and further applied to the whole society by Fuller [1996]. I would rather say that the substantialist assertion is a way to negate the importance of caste hierarchy and to utilize caste distinctions to bring about a creation or re-emergence of a new kind of image of caste interdependence in the ritual sphere, which is one of the main arena for forming one's identity in rural India. Here, there is the emergence of caste as ritual (sacrificial) organization which is based neither on competitive substantialization nor hierarchy. Rather, it is talked about in terms of 'service' and 'duty' of each distinct caste for the community and local deities.

Let us now see in concrete terms what forms of caste-based exchanges exist in a contemporary Oriya village and how they were formed in history.

IV. System of Caste Division of Labour and Exchange Reconsidered

Division of labour and exchange relations in Garh Manitri today

It has already been pointed out by many researchers that what has been called the 'jajmani system' in fact consists of several different kinds of relationships and these relationships do not constitute a coherent system [Commander 1983; Fuller 1989; Good 1982; Lerche 1993; Parry 1979; Pocock 1962; Raheja 1988]. Thus it is becoming clear that diverse kinds of relationships, which were forged and reformulated in colonial times after the fragmentation of the system of entitlements, were arbitrarily included under the label of 'jajmani system'.

The inter-caste exchange relations and division of labour found in present day rural Orissa can be divided first of all into two kinds. One is service for the community (A), and another is customary exchange relationship between individual households (B).

A. Services for the community

Services for the community include those provided for community rituals and to the deities in the village. These duties were originally

prescribed to different caste families as part of their obligation as community entitlement-holders. These obligations towards the community were often ignored under the discussion of 'jajmani system', but in fact they originate from the 'system of entitlements', which was the basis for the prescription of division of labour and exchange in the pre-colonial period. There were many other services prescribed for the community and the state under the pre-colonial system of entitlements in administrative and military spheres, but all of them were abolished under colonialism [Tanabe 1998, 1999a]. What remained were mainly ritual and religious services for the community. The ritual bias of these services of the community is thus a product of colonial history. But, as I will show later, the villagers today place special importance on these ritual duties as the basis of cultural identity of the family and caste.

There were also new services and offices prescribed for kingship and the state under colonialism. Carpenters (Baḍhei) and Blacksmiths (Kamāra) were granted *jagir* (tax-free land) for building the chariots for the Jagannath trinity in the annual Car Festival (June-July) in Puri.[12] Another case is the office of *sarbarakāra*, that is, 'tax collector' under the colonial government who received *jagir* in lieu of service. The administrative function of *sarbarakāra*s was abolished in the 1970s, while they continue to be patrons for the community festival with special ritual privileges. These new posts created under colonialism were obviously not based on the structure of community-kingship complex of the pre-colonial period, but were embedded in specifically colonial circumstances. However, these duties are also seen as 'traditional' by the local people today.

The kinds of services provided for the community are listed in Table 1. Although the table is listed by caste, it is important to note that the particular services were allocated to those families which held the entitlement for those purposes.

For the villagers today, the 'traditional' roles in community rituals represent the aspect of solidarity and cooperation of community members through caste and kinship. This gives the sense that 'tradition' (*paramparā*) includes the roles prescribed for different families which were supposed to have been granted by the king at the time of creation of the community and have been handed down

[12] Families of Blacksmith from the village stopped participating while Carpenter families from Garh Manitri still attend the construction work of the chariot in Puri every year.

from generation to generation (*paramparā* also means line). Also, it is considered that the local community can only reproduce itself by each caste family performing the prescribed duty for the whole as sacrifice. This aspect of the caste system as sacrificial organization is best represented in the community ritual [Tanabe 1999b]. We must be careful again, however, to remember that the ritual bias of the sacrificial organization is shaped by historical forces in the colonial period.

B. Exchange relations between individual households

There are four kinds of relationships that can be distinguished among the exchange relations between individual households. These are i) the relationship between the *jajmāna* (patron) and *purohita* (family priest), ii) the relationship between the *sāānta* (master) and *sebāka* (servant), iii) the relationship between the *sāānta* and *hālia* (bonded labourer), and iv) the relationship between *sāānta* and tribals. The exchange relationships are held between individual households rather than between castes, though the content of the service is determined by the caste of the service provider.

i) *Jajmāna–Purohita* (patron–priest) relationship
Vedic Brāhmaṇas perform rituals and function as the family priest (*purohita*) for 'high' caste—namely Warrior-peasant (Khaṇḍāyat), Scribe (Karaṇa) and other Brāhmaṇa—families on occasions of marriage, birth, funeral and death anniversary. Pūjāri Brāhmaṇas perform the same function for other castes (except for tribals and *harijan-dalit*s who have their own priests).

In the pre-colonial period, there seems to have been a special community entitlement for the *purohita*. This can be known from the presence of land named '*purohita hetā*' (family priest service tenure land) in the palm leaf records from the late eighteenth century [Tanabe 1998, forthcoming]. *Purohita*s enjoyed the share from this land as well as gifts (*dāna* and *dakṣina*) from the *jajmāna*. After the system of entitlements broke down, it seems that the *purohita* depended upon gifts from the *jajmāna* (see Table 1).

ii) *Sāānta–sebāka* (master-servant) relationship
This relationship is that between the patron (*sāānta* master) and the service providing households (*sebāka* servant), except the Brāhmaṇa.

TABLE 1
Services for the Community

Caste	Service
Baḍhei (Carpenter)	Provide wooden seats for the festival of Ramachandi (local goddess); some take part in the building of chariots for the Car Festival in Puri.
Bāuri (Stone cutter)	Provides *juna* (grass for the roof of 'sword's hut') for the festival of Ramachandi.
Bhaṇḍāri (Barber)	Carry the torch during the festival of Ramachandi.
Vedic Brāhmaṇa	Perform worship in community rituals of 'water goat' and the festival of Ramachandi.
Pujari Brāhmaṇa	Regularly perform worship in temples.
Dhobā (Washerman)	Regularly wash the clothes of deities of temples.
Gauḍa (Cowherd)	Regularly provide milk for making offerings to deities.
Guḍiā (Sweet maker)	Regularly make sweets and snacks for offering to deities.
Hāḍi (Sweeper)	Play drums and sweep the ritual fields and streets for community festivals, work as announcing messenger.
Jyotiśa (Astrologer)	Read the new calendar at *dala purnima* (the beginning of the lunar year).
Kamāra (Blacksmith)	Provide a knife for the festival of Ramachandi.
Karaṇa (Scribe)	Donate as patrons of the festival of Ramachandi and have the privilege of placing the iron pen and palmleaf script.
Khaṇḍāyat (peasant-militia)	Chief and ex-officials donate as patrons of the festival of Ramachandi and have the privilege of placing the iron pen and palmleaf script. Join the para-military procession. on *daśaharā*. Chief has other special ritual roles.
Khond (tribal)	Regularly worship Ramachandi.
Kumbhāra (Potter)	Provide earthen utensils for community festivals.
Māḷi (Gardener)	Regularly perform rituals at Siva Temple.
Saora (tribal)	One plays the role as the medium of Ramachandi and another as the sacrificer.
Teli (Oil presser)	Provide oil for lighting the torch during the festival of Ramachandi.

Households of Barber (Bhaṇḍāri), Washerman (Dhobā), Blacksmith, Potter (Kumbhāra), Astrologer (Jyotiśa) and Carpenter are said to perform services (*sebā*) for the patron households which consist mostly of those for the dominant Warrior-peasant caste, and are called 'servant' (*sebāka*) (See Table 2).

The *sāānta-sebāka* exchanges were not of dyadic nature in the pre-colonial period but were embedded in the system of entitlements, where the duties and shares were defined in relation to the community-state structure as a whole. The term 'servant' (*sebāka*) also meant that they were servants of the community as a whole, as the word 'servant of the fort' (*gaḍ a sebāka*) suggests. (Here the word 'fort' refers to the unit of local community consisting of a fort and several villages.) They were not servants of patron households in dyadic relationships. It is after

TABLE 2
Sāānta–Sebāka Relationships.

Caste	Content of the service	Service receiving castes
Baḍhei (Carpenter)	Make wooden utensils and furniture on order.	All castes except Dhobā, Báuri, Saora and Hāḍi
Bāuri (Stone cutter)	Day labourers	Mainly higher castes
Bhaṇḍāri (Barber)	Prepare the marriage platform; clean the front of the house for agricultural rite of *akṣa tṛtia*; act as messengers on auspicious occasions; cut hair, shave beard; cut nails, shave hair and beard on funerals; wives cut nails and put red dye on women's feet at childbirth and funerals.	All castes except Dhobā, Bāuri, Khond, Saora and Hāḍi
Dhobā (Washerman)	Wash clothes for both ritual and everyday occasions; provide and place firewood on the funeral pyre.	All castes except Bāuri, Khond, Saora and Hāḍi
Hāḍi (Sweeper)	Day labourers	Mainly higher castes
Jyotiśa (Astrologer)	Consulted about horoscopes.	All castes except Bāuri, Dhobā, Khond, Saora and Hāḍi
Kamāra (Blacksmith)	Make and repair iron tools.	All castes except Dhobā, Bāuri, Saora and Hāḍi
Kumbhāra (Potter)	Provide earthen utensils for life cycle occasions, funerals and agricultural rites.	All castes except Bāuri, Dhobā, Khond, Saora and Hāḍi

the fragmentation of the system of entitlements in colonial times that these exchanges were reformulated into dyadic relationships between households and that the 'servant' households came to be considered as servants of the landholding dominant caste households.

In the pre-colonial period, in addition to land given as part of the share, the performer of the service was given one bundle of paddy stalks a year from each service-receiving household, as the name of the gift '*biḍā barttana*' (bundle salary) suggests. This practice continued until the 1960s with some of the servants. According to the villagers, the arrangement was that the Barber and the Washerman received one bundle every year per couple in the family, and the Blacksmith per bullock plough. This prestation has a nuanced character as a 'gift-salary' whose semantics shift according to the point of view one takes. The patrons place more emphasis on its aspect as 'gift' which constitutes the 'master–servant' relationships whereas the

service providers tend to put more emphasis on its aspect as 'salary' or payment for the service.[13] Today, the gift-salary to the service providers is given not in the bundles of paddy stalks but in a measure[14] of paddy grains. The amount of paddy to be given is a matter of negotiation, and, at the time of the transaction, there is often bargaining between the patron and the service providers. The rising market price of labour has exceeded the value of customary gift-salary and the service providers attempt to demand at least the 'fair' payment according to the market price. The shifting semantics of the gift-salary, however, is more nuanced than what can be described as the penetration of market principle as the service providers also utilizes the logic of 'gift' in times of negotiation when they stress on how faithfully and sincerely they did their jobs for their 'master'implicitly referring to the patron's duty to be generous to the 'servants' in gift relationships [cf. Gregory 1997; Guha 1985]. Meanwhile, some castes, like Carpenters and Potters, have even changed their forms of payment to daily wage and piecework system respectively, thus retaining 'master–servant' relationships in name only.

There are now increasing cases of buying everyday commodities from the market. However, many customary exchange relations still exist between *sāānta–sebāka* households and those which are related to ritual in particular are maintained strongly, having important function as 'traditional' examples of community relations in the village. The semantic emphasis on the nature of the *sánta–sebáka* relationships have shifted to that of community exchange as they are contrasted with the market relationships.

iii) *Sāānta-hālia* (master–bonded labourer) relationship

Although some of the families of the low caste 'untouchable' Hāḍi and Bāuri were also given entitlements as 'military musicians' (*bājantari*; Hāḍi) and 'labourers' (*kāṇḍi*; Bāuri) in the pre-colonial period, the

[13] On 'coevality' of different values, 'switching' between them, and the case of 'asymmetrical recognition' where there are different cognitions of the same phenomena from different—superalternate and subalternate—points of view, see Gregory [1997]. Also see Guha [1985] on coexistence of subaltern discourse with dominant discourse.

[14] The measure used in this occasion is called *nauti* or *gauṇi* in Khurda region, Orissa which refers to a cylindrical basket about 25 cm in diameter and 25 cm in depth which is usually made of cane or tin. This is what is called a four seer *gauṇi* and it can hold four seer (= about 3 kilograms of paddy rice or nearly 5 kilograms of threshed rice).

amount of shares allotted was comparatively small and certainly not sufficient to sustain them [Tanabe forthcoming]. As a result, they had to work as bonded labourers (*hālia*) in the fields of larger landowners. They did not become agricultural labourers due to their place in the system of entitlements, but the system required agricultural labourers as there were 'high' entitlements the holders of which had a large share of land but did not cultivate themselves. As a result, the low castes with only a small amount of shares became agricultural labourers due to necessity. After the system of entitlements disappeared and slash-and-burn fields on which the lower castes depended were banned in the colonial period, their dependence on income as agricultural labourers increased [Tanabe 1998]. These bonded labourers began to disappear from the 1960s and were replaced by day wage labourers, as the Bāuris took up jobs as stone cutters and the young male Hāḍis started to go to towns for employment (mainly as cleaners)[15] in government and private sectors.

iv) *Sāānta–ādibāsi* (master–tribal) relationship

Although individual households do not have regular exchange relations with the 'tribals' and social relations between them are occasional, the relationship between 'caste Hindu' villagers (mainly Warrior-peasant) and *ādibāsi* (Khond and Saora) is interesting and worth noting. There is one lineage of Khond and two lineages of Saoras who reside in Garh Manitri. The Khond family was given entitlement as the priest of the regional goddess Ramachandi and the Saora families were granted entitlements as medium and sacrificer for the same goddess. They continue to serve the goddess holding the same entitlement lands today. These arrangements have been made in recognition of their special qualification as the mediator of the goddess's power. Besides carrying on with their work as the community ritual specialists for the goddess, the tribals continue to provide magico-ritual-medical services to individual households on request.

For instance, amongst the tribals there are those who produce various medicines from animals and plants in the forest. These medicines are said to include poison, love potions and medicine which induces abortion and are apparently actually used by the villagers. There is also a custom in which a sickly child or a child born just

[15] This is a case of 'secular casteism' where public servants are employed in terms of caste category.

TABLE 3
Sāānta–Tribal Relationships

Caste	Actual caste role
Khond (tribal)	Perform worship to Ramachandi on request by individuals or families; perform ritual before marriages to Ramachandi.
Saora	Provide indigenous medicine for curing stomach disorder and fever from evil eye etc. and magic potions for love and sex; 'buy' children for their well being; collect firewood, mushroom and wild meat from jungles for sale.

after the mother had a stillborn baby is 'sold' to tribals in exchange for a one-rupee coin and left with a Saora couple for a day. The child calls the couple father and mother from that day onwards and this relationship continues for the rest of their lives. Also, on the day of the wedding, Warrior-peasant women go with the Khond priest to worship Ramachandi in order to receive blessing for the marriage. The water offered to the goddess on this occasion is used to bathe the person to be married as part of the marriage ritual. The power of fertility of the goddess is passed into the water, mediated by the Khond priest. Tribals are also required by Warrior-peasants for curing the effects of the evil eye and possession by evil spirits as it is said that people are cured by fetching water offered to the goddess from the houses of the Khond priest or Saora medium and drinking it or sprinkling it over the body (see Table 3).

Caste and jajmani exchange in contemporary Indian village

The system of division of labour and exchange in the locality has always been changing in history, and is also undergoing change today. The villagers put 'traditional' value on the ritual services offered along the customary 'jajmani' and 'community service' lines. This is especially so since the non-ritual, customary division of labour and exchange is increasingly replaced by market exchanges.[16] Today, with the exception of certain chosen 'traditional' roles and relationships, which are mostly ritual ones, the domain of cash economy looms large. Villagers buy their everyday necessities from the trading castes in the village (ironware from Blacksmiths, pots from Potters, sweets from Sweets-makers and so on) or from shops in the village. Desire for

[16] The case of 'secular casteism' where Hāḍis are employed as sweepers by the governments is an important exception.

cash income has been growing in recent years and cash economy is increasingly permeating into village life.

It should be pointed out, however, that this is not a case of the market economy destroying or eating into the traditional jajmani system from the outside as it is popularly conceived. In fact, there has been coevality of community and market since ancient time in India. The forms of the relationships between community and market have changed in history and it is reflected in the transformations in the social exchange relations. In this changing process, we may note the working of the agency of the people. As regards the customary exchange relations, it is not only that they have changed in history but also that the villagers themselves as agents have actively introduced the principles of the market economy in selected areas. The village people have been instrumental in distinguishing between the sphere in which the market principle should be adopted and the sphere in which customary exchange relations should be maintained. This is related to the cultural politics of village people's identity formation, since the selection is based on the semantic framework of their understanding of what forms the core of their 'traditional' identity.

The introduction of the market principle in non-ritual fields is partly related to the working of the 'caste associations' (*jāti sabhā*) of lower caste groups. Let us see what caste associations are and how the lower caste groups attempted to form their identity and shape their position in society.

V. Caste Association as Agent of Change

Activities of caste association

Caste associations are a creation of the late colonial environment and they became prevalent from the end of nineteenth century. These caste associations were formed by extending and uniting traditional 'caste organization' (*jāti pañcāyat*) across regions in order to improve the social and economic status of castes as competitive units. The formation of caste associations represents 'substantialization' of caste in its paradigmatic sense.[17]

[17] It is significant that caste associations were formed in response to the colonial circumstances. The colonial government took the policy of non-interference to matters belonging to religion and 'native custom', and left 'caste questions' to the decisions of

In coastal Orissa too, many caste associations were established, such as the Sweetmaker association, Oil Presser association, Potters association etc.[18] These primary units of caste associations corresponded to the endogamous groups, which were further organized into district level associations and then all Orissa level associations.[19] Some castes have even established inter-state level associations, like *Karaṇa*s (scribes) who joined hands with *Kayastha*s of other states. The marriage circle has also extended beyond the original endogamous unit with the organization of a wider caste association. People say that the members of the same association are allowed to get married as they are of the same *jāti*, and marriages have long began to take place between families belonging to different regions, including inter-state marriages.

In order to raise their socio-economic status, caste associations specified detailed rules regarding marriage and work that the association members could perform. For example, the Barber (Bariko) association stipulated that they would not serve as messengers or take the used plates away after a feast for those other than Brahmans,

caste meetings. This is not only because of the principle of liberalism of the British government, but also because there was clearly 'an intention of the British colonial rulers to position caste groups as social organization of the smallest unit in India under British colonial rule and to utilize their autonomous ability to maintain order for the purposes of colonial rule' [Kotani 1994: 146]. This colonial policy gave privileged position to caste (*jāti*) as an autonomous unit. This kind of colonial administration, together with enumeration and classification of people in caste terms in the census, resulted in a heightened consciousness among the people regarding caste affiliation and ranking. Thus the policy of 'non-interference' has in fact greatly interfered and influenced Indian society [Dirks 2001].

[18] For example, the Oilpresser association, including the Garh Manitri region, was called *aṣṭarājya* (eight kingdoms), consisting of eight *rājyas* (kingdoms). Each *rājya* consisted of eight to twelve villages. The head of a *rājya* was called *beherā* (chief) and the head of the *aṣṭarājya* was called *sabhāpati* (association master). To give another example, 'Potters Committee' (*kulāḷa samiti*) of the same region was called *aṭharagaḍa* (eighteen forts). There were eighteen *beherā*s who headed each *gaḍa* (fort). The head of the committee was called *sabhāpati*. It is interesting that idioms of kingship such as 'kingdoms' and 'forts' are used in the organization of caste associations. It may have to do with the sense of sovereignty and autonomy of these associations. This opens up the question of the cultural logic of internal management of each caste in relation to the idea of royalty, but that will have to be discussed in another paper.

[19] For example, Barbers have, besides the local-level association, Puri District Bariko Association and All Orissa Bariko Association, the headquarters of which is located at a monastery (*matha*) in Puri, where their caste 'tutelary god' (*iṣṭadebatā*) Narasimha is worshipped.

Scribes and Warrior-peasants.[20] These rules were made to maintain their honourable identity and to keep up their social status. At the same time, they tried to improve the caste's economic status and education by offering loans, employment opportunities, scholarships and student hostels.

Also, caste associations tried to increase the members' income within the village. It is important to note that it was the caste associations' initiative which led to introduction of the market principle into non-ritual spheres of inter-caste exchange. Led by the leaders of caste associations, service castes negotiated with their patron families to displace the custom of 'bundle salary' where only one bundle of paddy stalks was provided annually by the provision of a measure of paddy grains whose amount could be negotiated. They also demanded the patron households to increase the amount of paddy they receive in lieu of services beyond the ratio fixed according to custom and matching the market price of the services. In some cases, like the Carpenters and Potters, they succeeded in negotiating with the dominant patron caste to pay the market price for each piece of work in cash instead of paddy. In Garh Manitri, it was by the initiative of the leader of the Potter's association that they succeeded in changing the deal from fixed annual payment to piecework sale system in the 1960s.

It should be noted that such moves by caste associations did not mean the destruction of all customary caste division of labour and exchanges. Caste associations have introduced market principles in selected interactions while maintaining the customary duties in religio-ritual fields. They could not deny their caste identity as long as they sought for status improvement based on caste membership, and tried to look for the basis of their caste identity in the customary roles in religious rituals. It is notable, however, that there was also a process of reformulation of their traditional identity in this sphere too. That is to say, the caste associations tried to deny what was considered dishonourable or degrading duties in the ritual tasks. For instance, Cowherds used to be responsible for carrying the palanquins of gods in festivals and upper caste members in marriage, but they refused to carry the palanquins of upper castes, maintaining that their 'authentic' and 'traditional' role was only to carry the palanquins

[20] Also, the Sweetmaker association in Khurda prohibited their members to sell eggs or betel leaves (*pāna*), which is considered the work of the Muslims or Washerman.

of gods in religious rituals. Here we can see the reconstruction of 'tradition' through a selective procedure.

The history of reorganization of customary exchange relations was born from village people's activities in pursuit of socio-economic status as well as honourable cultural identity in the colonial and post-colonial contexts. Here the idea that the traditional socio-economic system was destroyed by the advent of modern market economy and/or the ideology of liberal egalitarianism does not fit. The market principle, which has always had coeval existence with community, was utilized by the caste associations to replace some of the customary exchange relationships in the village to raise the socio-economic status of the caste group. Also, the discourse of egalitarianism was only selectively employed in specific contexts in matters relating to socio-political rights in the public sphere, and even here the subject for equality was caste groups rather than individuals. This is the case in matters concerning reservation policy for example. Also, the people's concern in reformulating their 'traditional' duty was not aimed at individual equality but mainly at honour and dignity of their caste group. In this way, there were constant workings of the agency of caste associations in the process of restriction of the sphere and reformulation of the contents of caste-based exchanges.

Withering of caste associations

However, caste associations gradually lost their relevance in post-colonial India after the 1960s. The new socio-economic dynamism, which gave birth to 'substantialization' of castes, further led to heterogenization within caste, as there developed differentiation of power and wealth within each caste [Fuller 1996: 12–3]. In such situation, it became increasingly difficult for caste associations to continue to work as one 'community' and impose strict rules for work and marriage. Gradually, caste associations lost their function to raise the members' socio-economic status, and became largely defunct in many cases.[21]

[21] While caste associations as a means of improving socio-economic status are thus gradually withering away, caste cooperation in the wider region continues to take place at the political level when common interests emerge to make demands on the state. This is especially important in relation to the policy of reservation and related caste politics. However, in the case of rural Orissa, this aspect of caste as political unit is less prominent.

As caste association stopped functioning as the agent for improving socio-economic status in coastal Orissa, it was now up to individual men and families to manage and attempt to improve their own welfare by utilising kinship and personal connections. In the socio-economic sphere of activity, it can be said that individuals and families, rather than caste, have become the main agents from the 1970s onwards. This also means that the negotiations of payment between service castes and patron dominant castes are left in the hands of individual households, giving disadvantage to service castes who can no longer depend on the power of aggregate negotiation by their respective caste associations.

In such a situation, whether caste-based exchange in socio-economic sphere will wither away or not depends on the two aspects of the patron–client relationship: its oppressive aspect and its protective aspect. It is natural that service castes will prefer to move away from patron–client relationships and opt for market exchanges in the economic sphere when there is enough demand by customers. If service castes remain in patron–client relationships, they will be likely to suffer oppression in the hands of the patron dominant caste, since the power relation between the castes will influence the negotiations.[22] However, in cases where there is severe competition in acquiring customers, the service castes will want to remain in patron–client relationships in which they can at least hope to get constant demand for their services.[23] When they see that they have no scope for increase in demand in the rural area, they may decide to try their chances in the towns.

In this way, we can see that after caste associations have stopped functioning, moves either to abolish customary jajmani relations or to maintain them are decided neither by the force of capitalism nor by the decision of caste associations. Moves and choices regarding transformation of economic relations are made by the agency of actors—as individuals in the web of socio-economic relationships and contexts—who try to maximize their gain in the economic sphere.[24]

[22] This explains the case of a young barber man who opened a hair-cutting salon in the village rather than stick to the old jajmani style exchanges. The salon has now gained popularity in the village.

[23] This is the case for the Washermen in Garh Manitri where there are apparently more Washermen than the local demand. Those who opt to remain as Washermen in the village choose to maintain the patron–client relationships.

[24] In previous literature, the protective aspect of patron–client relationships has been emphasized by the 'moral economy' school [Scott 1976], whereas their oppressive

VI. Caste as Sacrificial Ritual Organization

Caste ritual duty as the basis of identity

In contrast to the actions to pursue interests in the economic sphere, the continuity of caste division of labour and exchange in the ritual sphere cannot be totally explained in terms of rational choices by individual and family actors to maximize profit. This is because what matters in this field is not self-interest but caste identity. I would like to argue that the continuation of caste-based exchange and division of labour in the ritual sphere shows that the people in rural Orissa continue to see their caste ritual duty as one of the important sources of their identity. It should be noted that this does not mean that people accept the Brahmanical purity-oriented ritual values. On the contrary, there seems to be a process of renegotiation of the form and meaning of caste duties, as I have repeatedly emphasized.

The practice of caste division of labour and exchange in the ritual sphere is sustained and given significance in today's rural Orissa as a device for the maintenance of 'unity-through-diversity' of distinct caste communities. Here, idioms of 'duty' and 'service' as the basis of cooperation and coordination for the common welfare are gaining importance. It seems to me that there is now increasing emphasis on the form and value of caste as 'sacrificial' ritual organization, where each distinct caste has a role to play for the welfare of the local community and for the worship of local deities. Since local deities are considered as manifestations of a higher universal principle, often either Vishnu, Shiva or Durga, each duty is also considered to be a service for the universal God. Villagers say, especially in reference to the community ritual, 'Each caste has its duty to perform for God. Only if everybody performs his duty correctly, we can perform the festival to the satisfaction of God. And only if God is satisfied, He will give His blessings.' This seems to me to be an important move towards negotiating the meaning of caste on the part of the villagers.

aspect has been emphasized by the 'modernization' school. This was related to the discussion regarding whether peasants are 'moral' or 'rational' [Scott 1976; Popkin 1979]. However, it now seems that this discussion missed the point since whether the weaker section of the villagers would choose patron–client relationships or not depends not on the character of the peasants but on the socio-economic situation. If we look at the character of the villagers, they certainly make rational choices, but this does not of course preclude them being also morally responsive persons.

Caste and sacrifice

Here I would like to explain my understanding of the significance of sacrifice in relation to caste organization. First of all, the general meaning of sacrifice, in a few words, may be said to be the 'offering of (a part of) self for something greater than the self'. This process involves the two-fold path of death and rebirth. The offering of the self means death and deconstruction of the old self. But through death, there is contact with the original immanence, the source of life. Through this contact there is the reconstruction or rebirth of the new self which is given new life in relation to the sacred.[25]

Community sacrifice can be said to be a mechanism by which a community gains contact with the realm of the 'sacred'[26] so as to allow its power of life to flow into the process of reproduction.[27] In this connection, I have argued elsewhere through an analysis of a community ritual [Tanabe 1999b] that there are three social configurations and values—submission, hierarchy and dominance—each

[25] I feel that the most inspiring part of Hocart's theory is his suggestion that a polity-society may be seen as being organized to perform sacrifice in order to contact the sacred 'in quest of life' [Schnepel 1988].

[26] An understanding of the significance of the sacred-profane dichotomy is essential here. Dumont, despite his emphasis on the importance of the hierarchy of purity and impurity, in fact admits the existence of a realm of the sacred beyond society. His representation of the position of the sacred in the Indian world, however, is far from consistent [cf. Das 1982: 114–15; Tanaka 1991: 9–11]. The problem is that Dumont, in spite of admitting the existence of a realm of the sacred that encompasses the social level, could not take into account its meaning and function in Indian society [Dumont and Pocock 1959: 30–1; Dumont 1971, 1980]. His limitation seems to stem from the structuralist approach that can only deal with systems of difference. However, as Girard points out, the 'sacred concerns itself above all with the destruction of differences, and this non-difference cannot appear as such in the structure' [Girard 1977: 241]. Hence, structuralism fails to put into perspective the sacred which 'remains outside the structure, . . . banished by structuralism' [*ibid.*: 241–2]. Ironically, however, structuralism contributed in 'discovering the sacred', according to Girard, as it made it 'possible to distinguish the finite quality of sense of structure from the infinite quality of the sacred, that reservoir from which all differences flow and into which they all converge' [*ibid.*: 242].

[27] Admittedly, there are other qualities that human beings get from contact with the sacred. The most important among these, other than the generative power for reproduction in the Indian context, are perhaps transcendental knowledge (*jñāna*), divine sweetness or ecstasy (*rasa*, *bhāva*) and ultimately liberation (*mokṣa*) which are significant in renunciatory and devotional traditions. My contention is that the principle of sacrifice permeates these traditions also. But it will be out of place to discuss these matters here.

of which plays an indispensable role in the sacrificial process for social reproduction in India.[28]

The principle of 'submission' corresponds to the process of death and deconstruction that is the first part of sacrifice. Then the second part, namely the process of rebirth or reconstruction of the new self and social order, is achieved through the principles of 'hierarchy' and 'dominance'. That is to say, the community gains contact with the realm of the sacred through submission and self-destruction. By destroying its older form containing boundaries and segregation, it is able to attain mergence with the power of life and contact the original immanence. In this state there is no social order. Then, the value of Brahmanical hierarchy comes in to bring about social order by reconstructing boundaries and segregations between different sections of the community. At the same time, the value of royal centrality and dominance functions to gain the fruits of sacrificial work performed through the community ritual and to redistribute these fruits among the community members. By the term sacrifice, I do not refer only to sacrificial rituals. As all everyday actions are supposed to be offered as 'duty' and 'service' for the divine in the tradition of *bhakti* or devotion, the sacrificial principle can be said to permeate all aspects of life. The aspect of submission to the divine and non-relevance of concerns for hierarchy and dominance can be observed in everyday practices, for example, of receiving sacred water from 'tribal' Khond priest and/or Saora medium which is used to cure disease and mental disorder. What I am trying to suggest here is that the aspect of kingship and dominance as well as that of Brahmanical hierarchy may play an important role in certain contexts but is only a part of the larger sacrificial process in India in which the aspect of submission towards the divine arguably plays the most important and crucial role. Moreover, it is significant that the degree of importance of

[28] Raheja's notion of 'shifting positionality', where positionality and interrelationships shift between the principles of centrality, hierarchy and mutuality according to context and viewpoints, is useful in doing away with the scheme of presenting an overarching principle as in the Dumontian (hierarchy) or neo-Hocartian (centrality) positions [Raheja 1988]. However, her notion tends to fall to post-modernist relativism where everything is reduced to context and viewpoints, and lacks sensitivity to the actual politico-social structure in history in which these principles were embedded or the interrelationships between the three principles which should be coherent enough to make social reproduction possible. Also, for understanding the sacrificial process, the principle of submission is important rather than that of mutuality which does not seem to have much prevalence in Indian society other than in the sphere of market type exchange.

each aspect—hierarchy, dominance and submission—has changed in history. The aspect of submission, or offering of the self, is emphasized today as the most important feature of the sacrificial ritual in the villagers' discourse. This is related to what I have mentioned already regarding the villagers' insistence on the significance of the values of 'duty' and 'service' of each caste for the community and local deity.

By contrast, the aspects of hierarchy and dominance are underplayed today and the villagers are attempting to shift the semantics of caste order to that of cooperation and solidarity. In other words, there seems to be a development of a form and idea of caste as sacrificial ritual organization in contemporary local society in Orissa that underplays both the purity-centred hierarchy and the political structure of dominance. The villagers seem to be trying to transform the character of the sacrificial process by emphasising the 'submission' aspect, where each offers his duty as service for the local community and God. They are gradually reducing the aspects of 'hierarchy' and 'dominance' by the idea of 'cooperation' and 'service'.

Such transformation, as I have repeatedly pointed out, is achieved through the workings of plural groups of agents concerned, including the low castes. The low castes have made efforts to refuse to continue roles which they consider 'degrading' while maintaining roles which they see as belonging to their proper tradition. The sweeper-drummer, for example, are reluctant to clean the village before the community festival, but enthusiastically plays the drum for the local goddess. I have also mentioned already that the cowherd caste people refused to carry palanquins for marriage procession of high castes arguing that their 'real' traditional duty was carrying deities' palanquins only.

Nonetheless, since the idea of sacrifice in Indian history has long been related to the idea of hierarchy and dominance, it is not possible to simply discard its implications. There will continue to be a process of renegotiation of meaning in the field of power and ideology. The idiom of 'cooperation' is also employed by the high castes as an ideological discourse to maintain the structure of hierarchy and dominance. However, this does not mean that we should belittle the creative agency of the local people by simply assuming that the maintenance of caste-based ritual duties necessarily always leads to the reproduction of the power structure. As identity rather than self-interest has become arguably the most important focus in contemporary Indian politics—whether local or national—the matter of values has become a serious politico-cultural concern of the villagers. Values and ethics, that are the basis of identity, are not mere ideology of power but constitute

important politico-cultural concern for the villagers in themselves [Tanabe 2002]. We should pay sufficient attention to the subaltern efforts to constantly negotiate and transform the content and meaning of the ritual duties into democratically acceptable and existentially meaningful ones.

The reinterpretation of the meaning of caste-based ritual duties emphasising the 'submission' aspect of offering duties as service to God may be seen as a process of modern re-emergence of *bhakti* ideology which had previously led to counter rigid caste hierarchy in the pre-colonial period. However, the difference is that whereas the *bhakti* ideology in the pre-colonial period attempted to provide existential meaning to the work of each caste in all spheres of life, the re-emerging contemporary version seems to refer only to the role of caste in the inner ritual sphere. The socio-economic outer sphere is left out as not being related to caste solidarity or the ideology of sacrificial community. It is considered as a distinct sphere for the individuals and families to make most of their profit-or-power-maximising ability. The function of caste as sacrificial organization is limited to the ritual sphere here.

This kind of limited position given to caste as sacrificial organization only in the ritual sphere seems to reflect the fragmented form of life and the dichotomous consciousness of the villagers living in post-colonial rural Orissa today. Ritual duties based on caste indeed continue to provide people with their existential identity in the locality, but only in a fragmented way and does not encompass their entire life-style or worldview. However, there are preliminary attempts to connect the moral sense of sacrificial ethics to transform the practices in the larger socio-political spheres. It is worth paying attention to how the sacrificial ethic, which has mainly developed with the phenomena of caste, is now beginning to transform itself beyond ritual spheres to provide the basis of morality to the politico-economic spheres.[29]

VII. Concluding Remarks

In sum, caste in today's rural Orissa can be said to be placed at the intersection of its denial or withering in the politico-economic sphere and its reformulated continuity in the ritual sphere.

[29] Such complicated politics of tradition is beyond the scope of this paper, so I request readers to refer to another paper [Tanabe 2002, 2004].

In the official discursive sphere belonging to the ideal of 'civil society', caste is denied either its existence and/or value. The discourse of freedom, equality and democracy is certainly prevalent and influential in public space even in rural Orissa. The reservation policy represents a paradoxical concern of the government committed to the ideal of equality of civil society where the value of caste is denied but its existence is admitted. In the economic sphere, market principles have largely replaced customary inter-caste exchanges as a result of the initiatives taken by the lower 'service castes', where prices for the work were negotiated and in some cases replaced by business. Although caste association has played a vital role in such negotiations, it is now largely defunct due to increasing heterogenization within castes. There is a possibility for larger coordination of caste groups to form political agents in electoral politics [Mitra 1994].[30] The transformation of communities into political actors is a typical phenomenon in 'political society' in post-colonial democracies [Chatterjee 1998, 2000]. However, in rural Orissa today, this aspect does not seem to be very important in terms of the current political set-up.

In the ritual sphere, caste as sacrificial ritual organization plays an important role as the basis of people's identity. There is contested negotiation of forms and meanings of caste division of labour in this sphere. Since the centre of the negotiation is related to values of rightness and goodness, this aspect of caste may be said to belong to 'moral society' [Tanabe 2002]. Caste as sacrificial ritual organization includes but cannot be reduced to mere Brahmanical hierarchy or structure of dominance. Although these ideological and power relations certainly exist as part of the sacrificial structure, what is more remarkable to me is the robust agency of multiple sections of caste in reformulating its structure. The workings of multiple agents including the lower castes functioned to reduce the aspects of hierarchy and

[30] Mitra takes an 'instrumental view of caste' which suggests that 'caste is a resource that political actors use in order to negotiate their status, wealth and power'. However, such a view which reduces caste to an 'instrument' for acquiring wealth and power does not seem to do justice to his own position that '(i)nterpreting caste . . . leads to the larger issue of how to relate the ontology of jati and varna . . . to the moral basis of society and state in India' with which I fully agree (Mitra 1994: 50). This paper attempts to go beyond both essentialist and instrumentalist interpretations of caste, pointing to how the ontology of caste, that is sacrificial principle, takes a particular form and meaning in contemporary context and how it is (not) connected to the moral basis of society (cf. Tanabe 2002).

dominance in caste interactions. They also shifted their formulation and meaning to caste as a mechanism for community cooperation and the work thereof as 'service' and 'duty' for the community and God. Caste as sacrificial organization is not officially recognized, but has legitimacy in the ritual sphere of the local community in Orissa. This is one result of the continuous negotiations by the sections of people living in the locality to redefine and recast their identity in pursuit of honour and survival. It shows people's agency and efforts to mediate their sense of identity with the present socio-political ideas of democracy and equality. This is done by attempts to discover the form and meaning of sacrifice that would satisfy both cosmological ontology and socio-political equality. The importance of caste as reformulated sacrificial organization should not be disregarded if we are to do justice to the complex history of the local community and the agency of people in the locality.

Caste in Orissa has withered in the politico-economic sphere because it does not serve the pursuit of power and self-interest in the present politico-economic contexts.[31] Caste as sacrificial organization, on the other hand, has been reformulated in the pursuit of identity in disjunction from the politico-economic activities in post-colonial history. The dichotomy wedged between power-and-interests oriented politico-economic activities and identity-oriented ritual practices, however, seems to present a politico-cultural problem for today's India as a fragmented predicament of post-colonial society. Important agendas for contemporary India would be to overcome this dichotomy and provide the politico-economic spheres with a sense of value and ethics based on identity that is both democratically acceptable and ontologically meaningful to the people. In this sense also, it is worth paying attention to where the process of contested negotiation of form and meaning of caste is leading to and what kind of influences the values and ethics produced from such negotiations might have on people's ideas and practices in wider politico-economic spheres.

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[31] In other words, caste would play a political function in another context, like in Bihar.

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