

F G Bailey's Bisipara Revisited

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F G Bailey, the renowned British social anthropologist, conducted fieldwork in Bisipara in the highlands of Orissa in the 1950s to examine the ways in which the state, democracy and new forms of economy were changing the traditional organisation and apprehension of power and status. At the time, and following the Temple Entry Act, the former untouchables of the village attempted to gain entry to the Shiva temple. On that occasion, and as Bailey recounts, they were unsuccessful. A new fieldwork conducted in 2013 in the same location presents an update of the continuing drama surrounding the Shiva temple, against a backdrop of the changing polity and economy of the village, and as a manifestation of contested postcolonial identity politics.

In the village the hierarchy of caste-groups is no longer a complete reflection of economic realities, nor an adequate means of ordering political relations. Under the pressure of economic change, the political functions of caste are beginning to be taken over, as one might expect, by the ultimate political authority, the Government of India (Bailey 1957: 275).

F G Bailey, the renowned British social anthropologist, began his fieldwork in Bisipara, a village in Orissa when India's democracy was only a few years old. The new administration was beginning to find its feet and confidence. Novel ideas, responsibilities and forces were entering village life for the first time. Bailey stayed in the village between 1952 and 1954 for the most part with his wife Mary and their children. He set out to study what he saw as the beginning of a great transformation. He was particularly interested in the relationship between an older village hierarchy and the new state. The relations between castes, untouchables and tribes animated many of his initial research questions and structured his subsequent analysis. To be clear however, Bailey did not think the changes he witnessed marked the start of history or the end of naivety, because he placed his own narrative of the village within an historical account of shifting patterns of governance, revenue collection, and migration.

Nearly 60 years later (2012–14), a fieldwork conducted in the same location revealed some of the characters Bailey had known to be alive and well, and that some of the incidents he had recorded continued to be the sources of conflict and dispute, often along the lines he had foreseen. Bisipara is now Bisipada; Kondmals is now Kandhamal; Orissa is now Odisha; the distinctions are used in this text to denote the village, region and state in Bailey's time, and now.

Of the three villages in this greater project, Bisipara–Bisipada has changed the least. The morphology, ethos and orientation of the place are recognisable from both Bailey's writings and photography. The boulder-strewn Solanki River cuts a course through the hills close to the village which still looks remarkably similar to the fading images in Bailey's archive. It was also relatively straightforward to locate buildings and other features in the landscape from his photographs. The core shapes of many streets, houses and temples are likewise discernible. The village has not become a part of international migration routes; there has been a clear intensification of inter-exchange with the district town of Phulbani along an all-weather road and with the cities of the plains, but, in many ways, this seems to be just more of what Bailey described rather than something different.

This paper explores how some of the schemes and laws of modern India have altered life in Bisipada. The focus is on how

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legislative rights and entitlements, land reforms and anti-discrimination acts are negotiated in the village today, in some instances many decades after they were first introduced. These issues are inseparable from the changing nature of agriculture and the village economy (Nanda 1987), empowerment programmes, health and education systems (Nanda 1988) and violence in the region.

The key to understanding the changes from Bisipara to Bisipada are the fortunes of the Suda caste, the “warriors” as Bailey called them in his deliberately anglicised text. They ruled the village with authority and legitimacy, and although they did not have things all their own way, they maintained a hegemonic presence in the village which was discernible to Bailey. They had not been there since time immemorial, but had come from the plains, replacing the Kandha as lords of the provincial highlands. Their position seemed less certain with the arrival of new forms of economic opportunity and affirmative legislation. Other castes gained confidence, wealth and became part of other assertive political projects. However, despite these tremendous changes, the echoes of older social forms, like submerged structures in deep water, continue to play a role in the affairs of the village.

A treasury fellowship from the British government led Bailey into the Kondmals and to a doctoral thesis from the University of Manchester (awarded in 1954), supervised by Max Gluckman and Elizabeth Colson. Bailey wrote six monographs based on his fieldwork, and numerous articles, including an early series of nine papers which first appeared in this journal in the late 1950s. Throughout his work, he focused on structures and the organisation of the village in relation to the colonial and postcolonial state and mercantilism. Hierarchy and legitimacy were key themes. He presented much of his analysis of conflict through the eyes and points of view of the disputants.

The study of social change in Bisipara was published as *Caste and the Economic Frontier* (1957). He showed how through law, changing tax structures and education, the affluence of certain communities grew, while the wealth of others declined, and how new wealth led to particular kinds of social mobility within the caste hierarchy.

His second book, *Tribe, Caste and Nation* (1960), examines the fight for political power and land between “tribal” Kandha and caste Hindus and their various engagements with, and understandings of, the changing political structures of postcolonial Orissa. He analyses how different structures function, how they contradict each other at times, and how individuals manage to work within these structures. The analytical frames are, as indicated by the title of the book, those of tribe, caste and nation. Bailey based the analysis on a hamlet adjacent to Bisipara, although it is pretty clear that the terms of reference given by the main village play a central role in his understanding. His method, influenced by the approach of supervisors, uses case studies of conflict and cohesion. The social organisation of the hamlet and the wider networks of kin and polity develop an argument about the caste-tribe continuum.

The third monograph, *Politics and Social Change: Orissa in 1959* (1963), focuses on the system of representative democracy in the post-independence set-up.

In the 1990s, Bailey published a second trilogy (1994, 1996, 1998). In these later books, he focuses on the situation in the 1950s, but addresses themes of general anthropological and sociological interest. These monographs mirror themes developed in the first series. In this way, we could speak of two trilogies, or a second trilogy, which mirrors the first. His approach is more abstract and philosophical than his earlier work. Each volume takes a relatively straightforward incident and spins from that a portrait of the unspoken values which allowed the incident to occur and make sense in particular ways. The second of these books is a discussion of a temple dispute he witnessed in the 1950s. Bailey argued that the people of Bisipara were not genocidal enthusiasts because the cost of violence was simply too high. Violence, he reasoned, would break the “moral community” or “moral inevitability” of the village (Bailey 1996: 22, 83–86). We will return to this argument and the temple dispute later in the paper.

Odisha, Kandhamal and Bisipada

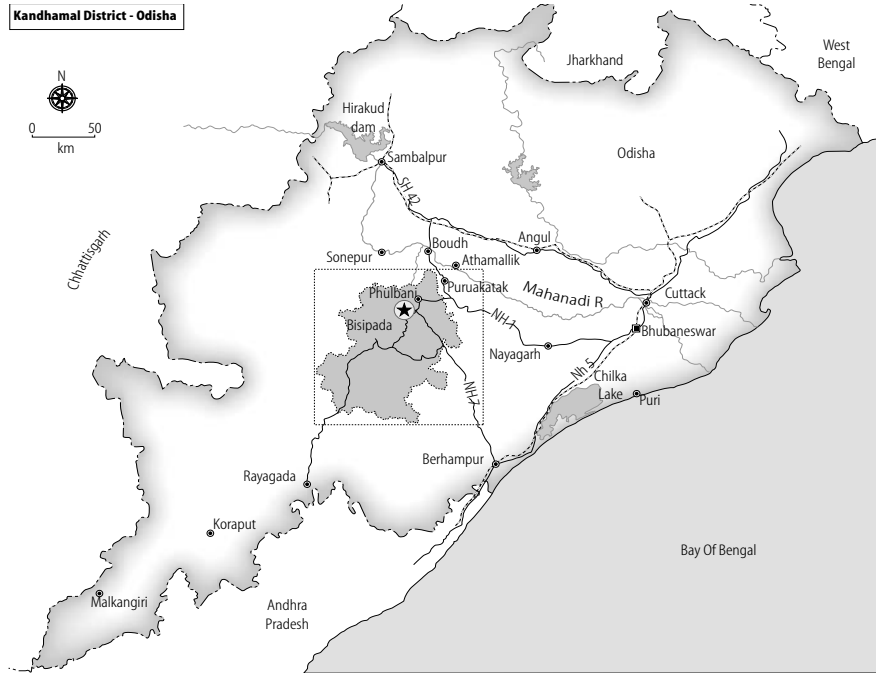
Odisha retains a rural orientation, with 80% of the 41 million population classified as inhabiting a rural environment.¹ Life in Odisha continues to be strongly influenced by what happens in villages. The state has a central cleavage between the connected rural and urban worlds, and in addition, a division between highlands and plains, which has been as important historically as it is today. The coastal areas, where we find most of the larger cities, differ significantly from the highlands, in terms of prosperity, gender expectations, religious practices and quality and level of education (Skoda and Otten 2013: 210).

Bisipada is situated in the highlands in the Kandhamal (Figures 1 and 2, p 27). The terrain is hilly and forested, divided by great rivers and smaller streams. The terraced fields are home to the Kandha tribes and their clients, the Pana. The story goes that Oriya Hindu communities (now called Suda) migrated from the plains to the Kandhamal more than three centuries ago. Bisipada was formerly a Kandha village, but the Hindu migrants from the plains usurped them.

The Kandhamal, separated by geography and history from the lowlands, is home to one of India’s largest ethnic groups, the Kandha. The anthropological community knows the Kandha primarily for their practice of human sacrifice (*meriah*). The sacrifice was to ensure good harvest. During the 19th century, the practice became the focus of British attention (for critical discussion see Hardenberg 2005). Conflict ensued, known as the “meriah wars” (Campbell 1864), as the British attempted to abolish the practice and control the territory. They encouraged the substitution of human with buffalo sacrifice.

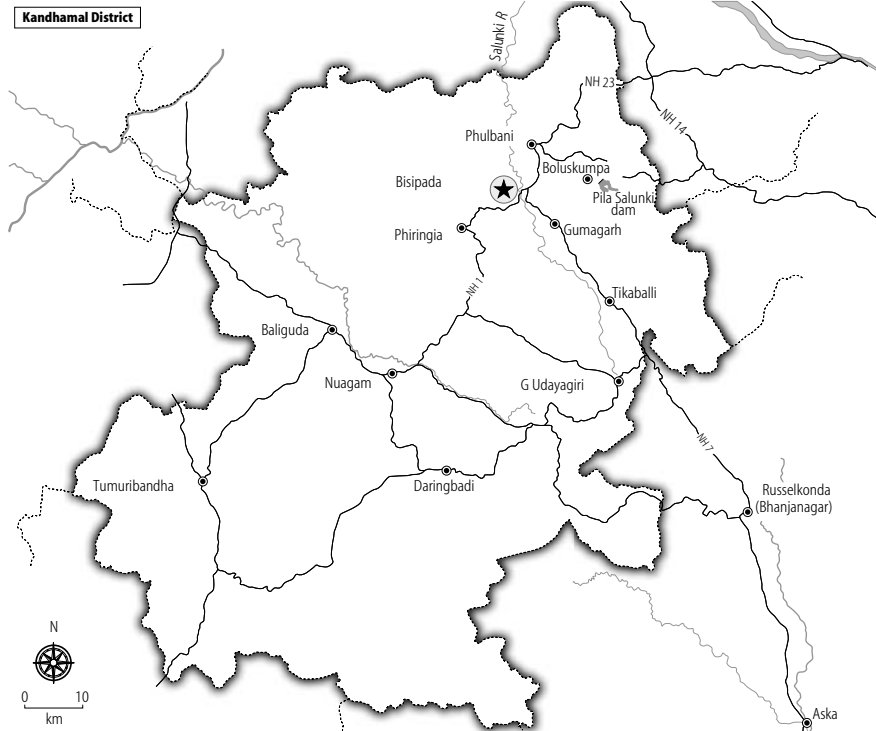
In Bisipada today, the meriah site contains the body parts of the last sacrificial victims, and continues to play important roles in the annual ritual for the earth goddess, which is conducted by a Kandha priest. Pigs and roosters have replaced expensive buffaloes in recent years. The communities historically involved in meriah continue to rank themselves in relation to

Figure 1: Map of Odisha



Source: Alteration of Odisha map by Tina Otten.

Figure 2: Map Showing Location of Bisipada



Source: Map showing location of Bisipada by Tina Otten.

the ritual. Members of the Pana community found and sold the meriah victims to the Kandha. Due to this practice, and other polluting occupations, they were regarded as “untouchables” and “clients” of the Kandha.

Today, various Kandha and Pana communities are agriculturists in remote parts of the state (Boal 1982; Hardenberg 2005; Niggemeyer 1964). Others live in or near the district market towns, running private enterprises or working in government posts.

In rural Odisha, they are best known for their resistance to “modernisation” (Boal 1978; Behera 1996). Some Kandha communities in the neighbouring district Rayagada (Hardenberg 2003, 2005) have become famous for their resistance against the state and private mining companies in the Niyamgiri Hills (Padel 1995, 2009).

After the Kandha had been defeated by the warrior castes from the plains, some three or more centuries ago, the Suda became dominant castes in many villages of the region. Their headmen (*sadar*) were installed as revenue collectors. With the advent of British rule, the administration in Kandhamal was built upon pre-existing structures and thus the role of the Suda was further endorsed.

In 1953, when Bailey arrived in Bisipara, it had been the headquarters of Besringia *mutha*, a cluster of villages, from which the Suda headmen extracted revenue on behalf of the British administration. In other words, it had been a significant place in the local set-up. The revenue units are known as *mouza*. Bisipada mouza is now a part of Phulabani block. It includes sites not formerly included in Bisipada, for example, Mandiapadar and Donga Khol; Asrisahi and Padia Berna, which were formerly part of Bisipara, now form a separate revenue unit, as indicated in the figures. We will return to the significance of these boundary changes later.

The boundary changes created practical difficulties when it came to resurveying the village. In the 1950s, Bailey conducted household, genealogical and land surveys, and we wanted to attempt something like that in order to have a similar broad dataset. However, and significantly, locations such as Asrisahi and Padia Berna do not belong to Bisipada anymore. Their inhabitants have turned their backs on

the village, adopting new social and economic affiliations within the new settlements. The inhabitants of these places are mostly from the Pana community. Their separation from the “moral community of Bisipara” was a key moment in Bailey’s ethnography, as we explore further later. What Bailey witnessed and understood as the consequence of state intervention in the life of the village was later enshrined in land reforms and new boundary settlements.

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In the other villages studied in our project, the population has grown between three and four times. Partly, because of the fact that Bisipada was given new borders in 1976, there are only 11 more households than there were in 1953. Bailey counted 180 households and 700 people, placing 3.8 people in each household. In the survey of 2013, there were 191 households and approximately 1,040 people, placing 5.4 people in each household. In 1953, the Suda and Pana formed 19.3% and 21.7% of the population, respectively. Today, the figures are 27.5% and 20.1%. Gouda, Kandha Gouda, the cowherds, and especially, the Kuli, the weavers, have moved away from the village either due to the lack of employment, or, alternatively, the possibilities of better employment elsewhere. The Kuli families have shifted partly to the nearby town Boad, at the frontier to the highland, since modern textile industries put pay to weaving as a cottage industry. The remaining Kuli families in Bisipada try to make a living as merchants.

Sociopolitical Implications of the Land Reform of 1976

During the time Bailey conducted his research, and for the decades to come, the Government of India launched the largest land reform ever carried out in the world. The restriction on selling tribal land to persons not belonging to the Scheduled Tribes (STs) was implemented in 1956. Further-reaching land reforms were not put in place in Bisipara until 1976. The economic and psychological effects of these measures were well-remembered in the village. Communities such as the Kandha Kumbhara (Kandha potter) saw a direct connection between the land settlement and the founding of their *samaja*, since they gained confidence in the sociopolitical value of their caste, registering the caste organisation with the state in 1994. In the same vein, interviews with Brahmins, Bariko and Dhoba often quickly came around to the 1976 land settlement. They stressed the fact that the possession of land changed their lives and raised their self-esteem as residents of the village and as members of their respective castes.

In *Caste and the Economic Frontier*, Bailey describes the mechanisms through which some members of the Scheduled Caste (sc) and distiller communities bought fields from Kandha Kumbhara, Kandha or Suda, since they had become wealthy due to laws favouring their enterprise in the new money economy. The land settlement of 1976 invalidated many of these arrangements, and, the Kandha Kumbhara and Kandha community, in particular, got their land back.

There remain a number of pending cases of disputed ownership and encroachment. Needless to say, the politics of land fused with caste and legislative politics means that these are contentious issues, the cause of frequent dispute and occasional violence.

Religion too has entered the politics of land in the region. In common with other districts with a significant Kandha population, the role of their caste society has played an increasingly important role. Some leading members of these societies have joined forces with right wing Hindu organisations, adopting a new politicised ferocity, which has led to communal violence (Chatterji 2009). In Kandhamal, the focus rests on aggression

directed against those who tried to “leave” the oppression of caste by converting to Christianity (Pati 2003). These are individual families, and sometimes larger sections of villages, of the scs, many of whom belong to a community earlier referred to as Pana (Kanungo 2008; Mahapatra and Bhattacharya 1996). This label is still widely used, and Panas are proud of their society, but it may carry derogatory connotations in certain circumstances. Some prefer the Gandhian term “Harijan,” but not all as this label is also used by communities of a lower status than their own.

As previously suggested people of this social stratum were clients of the Kandha and lived in close interaction with them on terms of unequal status relationships. The Kandha regard themselves as the high status “people of the earth” (Hardenberg 2005). Their clients mediated the relation between the Kandha and the “rest of the world.” Even today, many Kandha would hesitate to go to market to sell their produce without the help of a middleman from the Pana community. However, some influential Kandha claim that the Pana have overly benefited from the affirmative action policies of the state, and have selfishly exploited their positions in reserved posts in both government and private sectors. The Kandha also feel that the scs have lost respect for the traditional order; some of them have converted into Christianity to establish this shift with their faith. It should then perhaps come as no surprise that the communal violence of December 2007 and August 2008 was aimed at the Christian minority with a sc background, when earlier outbreaks of communal violence had been more generally directed at the scs.²

The aftermath of this violence haunts the district today. Popular and academic discussions of these tragic events suggest several possible explanations. First, the clash occurred as an expression of competition over land between ethnic communities (Guru 2011). Second, a religious dimension is stressed by indicating the changes in the hierarchy of the traditional value/status system in connection with right-wing groups and the apparent failure of the state to control these groups (Chatterji 2009; Wankhede 2009). Christians are considered a vulnerable community, because they have left the caste system symbolically and thus are held responsible for undermining the hierarchical order (Kanungo 2008). A third view regards Kandha as victims, too, because they fight their former clients and have been deprived of parts of their livelihood. This battle has been triggered by outside forces and is aided by indifference of executive forces. The state prioritised commercial interest, for example, global business gained access to mineral resources, over the protection of the tribal people and in doing so, opened up the field for communal violence (EPW 2008).

‘Administrative Frontier’: Power relations in Bisipada have transformed since the 1950s as protective and affirmative legislation has embedded itself in the tucks and folds of village life. Members of former servile communities have been able to gain legitimate positions in newly-established posts in the village council. The first sarpanch was from the Sundi caste (1953–62), the second Suda (1962–67), third from the scs

(1967–85). Narendra Sahani (also sc) followed him immediately in the role between 1985 and 1992. Sahani was to play a key role in the disputes we outline later, as products of the extension of the administrative frontier into village life. In 1992, the first sarpanch from the Kandha community was elected to be succeeded again by a candidate from the scs. The first female sarpanch was elected in 2002 (from the Kandha caste), after which, with a short intermezzo of some months, only Kandha men and women have held the post.

Village Economies: In Bisipada, the priest (*pujari*), barber (*bariko*), washermen (*dhoba*) and cowherd (*gauda*) are appointed in the traditional work relation called *jejeman*. However, these relations are disappearing. The washerman and cowherd of Subarna Sahi (Bailey's warrior street) left the *jejeman* relationships in 2013. After some weeks of persuasion by household elders, the washerman agreed to continue to wash the clothes of a few households, but not for all, complaining about how hard the work was. The cowherd did not return, opting instead to work on Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA) projects. Other traditional work relationships are *holya* (ploughing on a daily basis) and *mulya* (general work connected with the agrarian cycle). Many farmers complained about the difficulty of finding day labourers, as most now prefer to work in governmental schemes.

The MGNREGA provides a guaranteed wage labour for 100-days per financial year for those who volunteer to provide unskilled labour. Day rates for the agricultural labour of neighbours in the village are ₹70 for women and ₹80–₹100 for men, while the payment for people from elsewhere in Bisipada is between ₹110 and ₹120. The MGNREGA rate is currently ₹174, with discussion currently ongoing in the state about raising it to ₹200. In 2013, around 440 people were listed as working for MGNREGA, around half the adults of working age in the village. The disincentive for daily wage labour in the fields is clear. Also, according to landowners, the Odisha Food Programme for People below the poverty line, which was launched in January 2013, and provides heavily subsidised rice, has also allowed labourers to be more selective in the work they take on. With the cowherd gone, the cows strayed into paddy fields causing damage to the crop. The farmers took turns to herd the cows themselves, since they could not find a replacement herder.

In the 1950s, Bailey (1957: 42) saw that the village economy rested on agriculture, but this economy was no longer exclusively agricultural. Mercantilism and opportunities of employment were mixed in with the agrarian cycle. Today, a greater percentage of people are involved in the mercantile sector. There are government posts in the panchayat, health centre, forest department, schools and within various other governmental programmes. Sixty years ago, only a few men were educated beyond elementary school. A high school was inaugurated in Bisipada in the 1970s. Colleges in nearby Phulabani attract many young women and men from the village. A few have gone on to university, mostly in Berhampur.

Bisipada was and is a minor commercial centre for the region, although many buy goods in the nearby district town of Phulabani (as they did in Bailey's day). Many of Bisipada's 25 shops sell groceries; in addition, there are shops selling bicycles, chicken, fast food, stationery and mobile phones. There is also a miller and tailor. Unlike the 1950s, when Ganjam and Malua Sundi castes were in possession of nearly all shops, other communities now also establish such businesses. In the market area of Bisipada, the weaver families try to make a living by selling goods. In Subarna Sahi we find shops run by Kandha Kumbhars, Brahmins, Goudas and Sudas. Some of them were opened very recently, as it seems to be the case that commerce and private enterprise in the village is an expanding sector.

Some men migrate for work, to construction sites in Kerala or Gujarat, for example, but most return to their families in the village after a few years. Those in government positions might be posted elsewhere for fixed periods. However, migration rates are very low especially when compared to the same kind of studies conducted in two villages in Madhya Pradesh and Gujarat. Of the two largest communities in Bisipada, 2% of Suda and 5% of Pana migrate for work.

Social and Religious Change through State Laws

In the 1950s, Bailey saw the social structures of caste hierarchy in the organised village life at large. The landowning caste, the Suda, considered themselves as the leading caste and their headmen exercised powers similar to a king. Bailey was concerned with how such structures would be affected by the interpenetration of the juridical power of the state with the institutionalised and ritualised inequalities of the village (see particularly 1957, 1994, 1996). He also saw how the fundamental separation of castes from the non-caste or scs took on religious aspect.

In 2013, we found that the ritual boundaries between castes were weaker than in Bailey's accounts, but they are still evident and continue to exclude the communities considered below the line of pollution. Following the Orissa Temple Entry Authorisation Act 1948 (Orissa Act xi of 1948) and various subsequent legislation, it took around three decades before the scs were actually able to enter all the temples in the village. As Bailey (1996) recounts, the abolition of the practices and language of untouchability by the state involved introducing some rather radical new ideas to villages such as Bisipara. At the village level, the new practices of post-abolition untouchability have little resemblance to the paper versions of these acts. Ideas of modern citizenship and older caste identities have become entangled in the competition for control in the village and to access the resources of the state.

Bailey (1957, 1996) makes frequent reference to an incident which happened in Bisipara shortly before his arrival. For him, this became the key to understanding both the interaction of caste and modernising society and the intentions of the state and their local realisation at the village level. He was told that the incident was the attempt to implement the temple entry act in the village, which had been passed by the government a

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few years earlier. The act permitted every Hindu to enter temples. Before, castes considered untouchable were not permitted to do so.

On the occasion of a festival, a group of untouchable sc (Pana) led by the schoolteacher Krupasindhu Sahani announced publicly that they would demand an entry into the temple. The group chose the Shiva temple which played a marginal role in the daily religious life of the village. According to Bailey, this marginality was reflected by the fact that a Brahmin of a lower sub-caste was appointed as the custodian, but on a day-to-day basis the temple was actually run by his servant from the Mali community. Furthermore, the Suda, the warriors, did not care for the Shiva temple as they did for the Ram temple in their own street.

When the sc group arrived at the temple, they were met by guards armed with battle-axes. The protestors had informed the authorities in Phulbani about their move. As a result, a sub-inspector and two constables arrived to sort out matters. In the course of the ensuing argument, the sc group claimed they were legally entitled to enter the temple. The Sudas did not directly react by opposing the new law; instead, they reasoned that because they were not the owners but the trustees of the temple, and since the temple belonged to all Hindus of the Kandhamal, when everybody had been informed and agreed, they would stand down and be allowed entry. The sub-inspector informed both parties of their legal rights and threatened to station some constables in the village until the trouble ended. The sc group decided to stand down. Later, under the leadership of Sahani, they built their own temple in their street.

Those considered to be the “clean castes” of Bisipara punished the Panas by allotting the privilege of making music on festive occasions to other sc groups from outside the village. However, other economic links, and farm labour in particular, continued unchanged and the members of the Pana community attended major village festivals, as they had always done, without again demanding the right to enter temples. Bailey concludes that although one door had been publicly closed to the Panas, most others remained open.

Sixty years later, the Pana community now plays a major role in the administration and management of the Shiva temple. The dispute which Bailey discussed led to the Panas building a new temple, in their street, which led, in time, to the formation of a new revenue unit in the 1976 boundary settlement. The descendants of the Mali servant, who managed the temple during Bailey’s time on behalf of the Brahmins, have become the principal priests. They claim that the Brahmins adopted their ancestor as their own, and they are therefore the rightful caretakers (*marfadar*) of the temple, with all its rights, duties and privileges.

Since the first attempt in the 1950s, the scs made repeated efforts to enter the temple. However, it took them more than 25 years to finally enter both Shiva and Ram temples, which eventually happened with the aid of local police in 1975. The local narratives of these events suggest that the Mali priests refused to perform any rituals for the scs after their entry was enforced. They refused to break the coconut for the wife of the

State Minister for Steel and Mines, Padmanaba Behera, who was herself from the village. She was the daughter of the younger brother of Krupasindhu Sahani, who led the first attempt to enter the temple in the 1950s. Following the lead of her ancestors, she sacrificed a coconut for the god within the sanctum of the temple. In 2005, the temple committee was made into a temple trust. The hereditary spiritual headship was abolished, and the trust now holds elections for president, secretary and board members.

Caste and Power Today

Although Bailey saw the temple as marginal to the dominant interests of the village, current stories about its significance are rather different. According to Jayadev Bisoi, son of the former warrior headman of Bisipada, who still acts as an *adhikari* in the ritual events of the village, the Shiva temple was constructed when Bisipada was the administrative and religious centre of the 50 *muthas* of Kandhamal with the *adhikari* having full responsibility for the temple. As the *adhikari* Bisoi was responsible for the *homa* on Shivaratri, representing the whole village community in front of the gods. During Shivaratri in 1984, the ritual dominance of the Suda caste was contested. A member of the Pana community suddenly claimed that right of *homa*. The claimant was Narendra Sahani, a retired army man and a close friend of the then long-serving sarpanch. In the course of the argument, the Suda had to step down. Sahani won the elections for sarpanch the following year and became a popular reformist within the village. What exactly happened that night has not been conveyed, but it seems the Sudas were disunited in the face of the unforeseen and unexpected challenge.

Thirty-five years had passed since the scs first attempted to enter the Shiva temple. For the next 30 years, the old *adhikari* was not involved in the rituals at the temple, but Bisoi took charge again in 2014. Between 1984 and 2014 the son of the Mali temple servant, and now eldest priest of the Shiva temple, would sit at the *homa* on Shivaratri nights, taking the place of the *adhikari*, while his nephew conducted the work of the priest.

The conflict over access to the Shiva temple never came to a complete rest since the first agitations of 1950s. In 2014, the village awaited verdicts from two court cases, dating from the time when the old village temple committee was converted to a trust in 2005. The temple committee was a village institution and was built on the old power structures of pre-independent India. The post of an *adhikari* is hereditary and denotes spiritual supremacy. It was always connected with the post of the headman, who was installed by the British to collect revenues. The position was comparable with that of a king (*raja*) in relation to its subjects (*praja*). Even though there is no “headman” anymore in postcolonial India, the post of *adhikari* still has currency in Bisipada.

The trust was formed with the idea of securing the temple property, and comprised members of Suda, sc, Kandha and Sundi communities. The land accompanying the temple could not however be held, as it had been already sold and registered in other names. The adopted grandson of the original Brahmin priest managed to sell the land with the support of

the then sarpanch of Bisipada after his stepmother was murdered. With this source of income lost to the trust, another option was to secure the post of caretaker for the temple. This position was occupied by a priest, who had a document to support his claim.

The temple trust planned to remove the priest and sideline the other Malis by introducing a ticket system for the temple. At this point of the controversy, the fight broke out openly, and, in a spirited argument, the Mali priest called the secretary of the temple trust a "Pana," referring to his caste name, but doing it in a degrading way. Such humiliating naming is forbidden in secular India and led to his arrest, along with all the male members of this family on the grounds that they might not have legitimate rights to serve as priests. They were kept in custody for some weeks. The temple remained closed, because the key was with the eldest Mali priest. The locked temple became a liability. Members of the temple trust felt that they should act to alter the situation, and attain the keys as token of their responsibility. The idea of conducting a hunger strike developed, which was publicly announced: "when the god cannot eat because his house is locked and his servants are in jail, then the devotees will not eat either."

The members of the trust announced a specific day to sort out matters. On that day, the *tehsildar* arrived in the village with the keys of the temple. After some discussion, he handed over the keys, interestingly, neither to the sarpanch nor to the president of the temple trust, but to the *adhikari*, who was not involved in the temple trust directly, but stood for a bygone era. Finally, the *adhikari* returned the keys to the Mali priests.

During the fieldwork, the worship in the temple was routinely conducted. However, on Shivaratri of 2014 another demonstration of power occurred. The mixed-caste temple trust opposed the attendance of the Mali priests on the grounds that a cow had died in one of their houses, and therefore, all Malis would be impure. This deprived the priests of their largest source of revenue for the year. The temple trust entrusted the priest of the Ram temple to perform the *homa* in the Shiva temple. To emphasise the importance of the event, the *adhikari* was also reinstated as supreme sacrificer to receive the blessings for the village community. It was his first appearance at the Shiva temple in this role since 1984.

The next morning, the Mali priests went to the police station to lodge a complaint with the officer who was present during the fight over access to the temple between Malis and Sudas the previous night. The Malis were sent back and warned not to cause any further disturbances, while legal cases are still pending against them. One pending case was about a fight between the priest and a sc member of the temple trust some years before.

With this narrative of past and current events, the Shiva temple in Bisipada continues to stand as a site for negotiating caste identities and modern Indian citizenship as well as certain ideas of class. Through these ideas, questions of access to economic means are dealt with. It seems, over the years, the focus of conflict might have changed or is fluctuating from negotiating status to negotiating access to land and income.

The motive for the fights, has it seems, changed over time. The status connected to caste plays a subordinate role, not the principal role as it did in the 1950s. Land and income from the temple are now at the centre of the dispute. The fight over these resources is conducted through the legislative apparatus of the modern state, with recourse to caste identities when these are strategically useful.

Conclusions

All communities in Bisipada have been given space in which to act with opportunism and agency by the postcolonial state. These spaces and the possibilities offered are not uniform across the range of inhabitants. The results of affirmative action are in themselves differentiating. Even in the 1950s, Bailey could foresee that those subject to reservations were moving closer to the state and those without towards a market-led economy, a claim echoed in recent literature (Higham and Shah 2013). The traditional relation between landowners and landless has been altered, a process which began with the coming of mercantilism and universal education. Perhaps the most significant aspect, however, has been the slow entrenchment of the idea that people are citizens of the state or nation and not primarily or exclusively members of a moral village community, as Bailey described.

The Indian state had sought to erode the hegemony of caste and discriminatory and exploitative practices associated with untouchability. Legislation, such as the Temple Entry Act, were direct interventions by the state in the intimate lives and relationships in villages such as Bisipada. This and other legislative measures have taken years to bite. When traction was achieved, it was perhaps as much to do with the changing economy of the village, as it was the fact of the legislation itself. Bailey was clear, from his very first ethnographic writing that those who were economically independent of the village were least bound by its rules, traditions and sanctions. Later, the 1970s brought land reform; the landless became landed. This radical shift reduced poverty and fostered self-esteem. In essence, the ways in which independence or autonomy from the village can be achieved have both diversified and multiplied, and the spaces for agency have widened as the rules of the game have been made more equitable, if not less divisive.

Many families of the former untouchables have actively turned their backs on the local associations of their caste habitus, in favour of acting and imagining themselves as citizens of India. In the 1950s, Bailey saw their first attempts at claiming space within the village. At the time, they were only partially successful, and built their own temple in their own neighbourhood. During the land settlements, they joined another revenue unit, further separating themselves from their old masters. The former untouchables who remained in Bisipada played active roles in the politics of the panchayat and in the ritual life of the village. One of their members even managed to become the supreme sacrificer during Shivaratri at the Shiva temple, which symbolically represents the religious community of all Hindus in Kandhamal.

REVIEW OF RURAL AFFAIRS

In the few realms where former untouchables have not been able to penetrate the domain of the caste Hindus, such as the major festival for which Bisipada is renowned, they act out subplots of the greater drama for themselves or simply attend their own temple. Access to education and jobs in private and government sectors in and out of the village contributes to financial autonomy and the continued devaluation of farming as a moral and economic activity. Most fields produce just one harvest of rice annually; they could produce more, but nearly half of the working population is enrolled in work schemes like MGNREGA or in governmental supply schemes. The offices which implement welfare have reserved posts, which means

Kandhas play an increasingly important role in mediating the relation between the village and local resources of the state.

Kandha and Sundi are not visible in the strife over the Shiva temple, perhaps reflecting its marginality, as Bailey had it, or the relative autonomy of both groups from the moral village community. The Shiva temple continues to serve as the stage on which Sudas and scs can rework and experiment with the new rules of the game. The small Mali community is both foil and co-dependent in this local dramatisation of national politics. Even though a member of any community can now become a legitimate part the temple committee, there remain boundaries within the village which are yet to be crossed by the scs.

NOTES

- As per the data from the Census of 2011: Total population is 41,947,358 in which 80% (34,951,234) live in a rural environment and 20% (6,996,124) in urban areas. Available at: http://censusindia.gov.in/2011census/censusinfo-dashboard/stock/profiles/en/IND021_Orissa.pdf, viewed on 9 November 2015.
- The communal violence was ignited after the murder of a Hindu proselytiser by the Naxalites (Chatterji 2009; Pradhan and Padhi 2008; Wankhede 2009). The Naxalites had admitted the killing but right-wing organisations with strong trans-local connections succeeded in accusing the Christian communities.

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