

The 'transition' of the ethnographer into indigenous culture: Talks with a Brahman in 'Rajakshetra', Kumaon Him laya

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[Original p. 103:]

Abstract - Based on V. Turner, Pitt-Rivers, R. Burghart and a broader understanding of passage rites - a 'non-classical' passage rite is described, which, on the basis of Turner's concept, is associated with the liminoid: the attempt to influence the ethnographer towards an 'Indian' view of things. This inculcation of 'official', sometimes euphemistic contents may be interpreted as an attempt to integrate the ethnographer - it is an attempt to influence the ethnographer, to facilitate a passage from his culture into the local setting, in matters of belief, perspective, opinion, etc. To make this process transparent taped conversations have been prepared with the help of discourse analysis. Burghart's concept of the anthropologist who meets his 'Brahman counterpart', a specialist and interpreter of his own culture, has been modified and differentiated. A similar theoretical text by Obeyesekere has been included in the discussion. The combined application of Burghart's model and the theory of passage rites has been found useful to explain the empirical processes (intentions, agency).

1) 'Non-classical' passage rites and 'classical' theory

Since the notion of ritual is rather ambiguous it does not seem necessary to prove that the following 'non-classical' passage rite belongs to this category. The 'Ritual Schools' have been attested 'theoretical fatigue' by Jack Goody already 25 years ago - varying definitions which rendered attempts to interpret a given ethnographic situation according to this concept meaningless. 'Universal' models on this basis showed a degree of generality that was too vague to be applicable.¹

Goody contests the meaningfulness of the notion of ritual, namely, that (as V. Turner said) in ritual essential qualities of human beings would show ('how people think'). Goody mentions four reasons why this is obliterated: 1) the formalism of ritual; 2) the culture lag - i.e. the time span between the creation of a ritual with its meaning and present practitioners and recipients; 3) the factor of public enactment (creating distortions); and 4) that rituals are 'masks of the real self'. Goody (1977: 33) regards the possibility of translating the notion of ritual in each

ethnographic context as a solution to this problem, i.e. it would be necessary to describe the concrete meanings in the concrete setting.

Despite this state of affairs I would like to show that the ethnographic case described below falls in line, as a passage rite, with definitions and reasoning of van Gennep and V. Turner. For this purpose I will refer to some basic texts (van Gennep 1992; Turner 1969, 1982; Pitt-Rivers 1986), and specifically Burghart (1996a) - the latter being a paper usually not connected with transition rites.

The fact that passage rites do not exclusively refer to traditional transitions such as birth, marriage, death and the like is already inherent in van Gennep (1960: 166ff.). He abstractly defined these rites via the categories of separation, transition, and incorporation, and he first used these terms rather literally: 1) rites of separation could be funeral rites; 2) rites of transition might be included in pregnancy; 3) incorporation for instance took place in marriage when another person was integrated into a family (1960: 11). Beyond that, van Gennep has termed rites of separation as 'pre-liminal' ones; rites of transition as liminal rites; and rites of incorporation as post-liminal rites (ibid.).

This leads us to the concept of liminality. It appeared already in van Gennep's texts but became central in Turner. Since liminality and liminoidity are important con-

[Original p.104:]

ceptions regarding the process described below, I shall elaborate on them to some extent.

Turner (1982: 24) has modified van Gennep's notions (separation, transition, incorporation) in the following way:

Separation is described by van Gennep as separation from things one is used to, namely, everyday life: the phase of separation would clearly separate sacred space and sacred time from profane or secular space and time - there has to be a rite which changes the quality of time and thus generates a cultural realm or field defined as being 'outside of, or beyond time' (ibid. 24).

Van Gennep's next, the transitional phase - within which Turner constructs his liminality/ liminoidity concept - is described as being ambiguous:

"During the intervening phase of transition, called by van Gennep "margin" or "limen" (meaning "threshold" in Latin), the ritual subjects pass through a period and area of ambiguity, a sort of social limbo which has few (though

sometimes these are most crucial) of the attributes of either the preceding or subsequent profane social statuses or cultural states." (ibid. 24)

Van Gennep's third phase, incorporation or reaggregation, after crossing the threshold, includes (according to Turner) the return of the subject into his/her relatively stable and well-defined position in society - it is the progression from an 'earlier socio-cultural state to a new one' (ibid. 24).

This definition not only includes thresholds of natural-material and body development but also 'thresholds of meaning': such as crossing the threshold of an authority, an examination, or acceptance of a person in a group.

Turner's liminoidity enlarges the spectrum of passage rites by including non-sacral phenomena: "In the so-called 'high culture' of complex societies, liminoid is not only removed from a *rite de passage* context, it is also 'individualized'. The solitary artist *creates* the liminoid phenomena, the collectivity experiences collective *liminal* symbols." (Turner 1982: 52) Turner defines differences as well as similarities of liminoid and liminal and also the coexistence of both types in a given culture.²

In analyzing air travel as a modern transition rite Pitt-Rivers (1986) has presented a detailed description of a 'liminoid' rite.³ Here, he uses the categories of space and time, Turner's liminal/liminoid, as well as the symbolism of the processes involved: the meaning of the ground personnel, sacrality of the cockpit, symbolism of airports as 'temples' and focal points of the National, airlines as representatives of national symbolism, etc. Turner had defined liminal phenomena as pertaining to the sacred realm while liminoid was used for secular, or 'profane' processes. Pitt-Rivers, on the other hand, constructs, or stylistically implies, a kind of sacrality in air travel, which, according to Turner, would be 'liminoid/profane', but which now becomes 'liminoid/'sacral'. Thus, attribution of sacrality, in this case could be a way, a style, just to establish the action of flying as a rite (which, however, in traditional or mythological reading, that is according to original definitions, is a itself 'sacral' entity).⁴

2) Other theoretical models

The ambiguity of the liminal state has been described as culture shock by St. Clair & Koo (1991). Both authors stress the psychological aspect

and treat the trauma of travellers between cultures as a rite of passage. Starting with van Gennep, and using Turner's categories, they describe the phenomenon with the help of communication-theoretical categories (P. Berger and T. Luckmann). They also utilize Mary Douglas's in-/out group mechanism which sees the cultural outsider as defiling and representing chaos (ibid. 135), a state that is to be changed. St. Clair & Koo develop a structural model of life- and culture shock of several variations. The range is from being hurt, denying the injury, loss of self, to compensation of the experience.

Furthermore, the passage of the ethnographer can be explained with the help of the acculturation model: Step by step knowledge and expertise of the culture is gained - and the newcomer is increasingly accepted, by proving his knowledge and under-

[Original p. 105:]

standing in everyday interaction. The theoretical focus of acculturation and enculturation is not primarily directed towards reactions of the environment - as in the case of passage rites, where the focus of the community is on the person/s who undergo/es passage processes. It is the community who is the 'rule giver' in the case of passage rites initiates have to pass. Concepts of acculturation and enculturation, however, focus on the changing person: what is important for him/her. What influences those in the process - rules, norms, 'structural' events, chance events, is of secondary importance.

Turner's 'ambiguity of the passage' as well as Douglas's "Chaos and pollution" has been prominent in the passage rite I am going to describe below. It is a passage process in which the ethnographer is being influenced by the Brahman, in order to inculcate the latter's view of cultural events and 'facts' in the ethnographer.

3) The passage of the ethnographer

During fieldwork on a traders' caste in Rajakshetra, there was also daily contact with a Brahman - which is the topic of the present paper. To assess this field situation I utilize a text of R. Burghart (1996a). The text does not deal with the processuality of the phenomenon but semantic questions and problems of the two knowledge systems involved - that of the ethnographer and the Brahman's'. In the field situation in India ethnographers discovered, according to Burghart, that "...it was already occupied and defined by local counterparts - Brahmans and ascetics who spoke about the social universe in the name of Brahma." (1996a: 89)

This is of theoretical importance because "...both persons totalize social relations as a system in which they act as knowers and in which their knowledge transcends that of all other actors. In their transcendence each person claims some measure of autonomy in the world. Their autonomy, however, is differently construed: the former seeing it as objectivity, the latter as divinity." (ibid.) The combination of the two approaches - passage rites and interpretation of knowledge systems - seems to be fruitful in this ethnographic setting. It results in a higher degree of 'thick' description.⁵

I will first describe the ethnographic setting and discuss Burghart's paper when necessary.

During the whole period of fieldwork on the Agraval caste (1995/96) there have been daily meetings with 'Dr. Pandey' (a pseudonym), my 'brahmanic counterpart', which were filled with discussions of many topics and with Hindi training. Dr. Pandey was sixty-two years of age, a doctor of literature, and high school teacher for Hindi and Sanskrit in a boys' school. He retired in 1996. His local position was one of an intellectual (in a traditional sense - a 'man of letters') of high status. He was a very knowledgeable man - the teacher of most men in town and revered by many.

His eminent position and the fact of an ethnographer visiting him who already 'knew' Indian culture more or less, including Sanskrit, created an ambiguous field situation. During the conversations again and again a phenomenon surfaced which might be described as "rival interpretation". Here, two viewpoints and interpretations met, or clashed, which sometimes resulted in conflict. Due to the basic situation - Hindi training and the fact of Dr. Pandey being a teacher - the ethnographer naturally had the position of a student. On the other hand, topics of discussion included views and behavior of the Brahman, his caste, and other castes - specifically that of the Agrav ls.⁶ Because of the ethnographer's aim of 'scientific processing' of his findings, he conceptually positions himself *above* his counterpart - but so does the Brahman, in his own view: He stands above the ethnographer who knows less about the Indian world. One could go further here by considering other positional and 'ranking' criteria, as Dumont has done (1986; cf. Oberdiek 1991: 281-284), but this is not my present aim.

In the present case, views and opinions on textual matters (classical texts) sometimes differed. Such texts are still cultural focal points and do have their effect and place in everyday life. Even rather uneducated

persons from the above-mentioned Agraval caste have approximate knowledge of the contents of Dharmaśāstras, Upaniṣads and the Bhagavadgītā, and some were able to recite parts from Tulasī Dās'

[Original p. 106:]

Ramacaritamāsa.⁷ Thus, when views on textual themes were discussed, differing opinions sometimes surfaced. Mr. Pandey displayed a basically 'official', and somewhat euphemistic interpretation of his own culture, while I, as an ethnographer, took a more critical position, that is, according to *my* culture. I did not try to assume the role of a 'Brahman' - which is considered legitimate during the fieldwork process by Burghart (see below). The only change of behavior on my side was a partial restraint of diverging (western, critical) opinion in order to avoid confrontation. Now, if the ethnographer applies, or positions 'filters' of scientific categorization and thinking between him and his/her counterpart - can this be considered as an even stronger variety of Brahmanism than the one described by Burghart?

Related terms such as eurocentrism and cultural imperialism are too general and non-specific to describe the present case of Brahmanism. Burghart's 'European Brahmanism' may relate on the one hand to Indian (theological) categories in social science studies, but on the other hand to a rigorism and purism of a scientific, or western-value-oriented kind - when working as a social scientist in India. Such (western) behavior can be termed Brahmanism as well - as in the case of eurocentrism - when it does not do justice to the context, and if the context is not considered according to the present methodological state of the art. This, however, also includes judgements - *which* approaches and methods would be the 'right' and 'valid' ones.

Another epistemological consideration relates to the speech act which always includes diverse levels, intentions, roles, etc. - as has been shown by linguistic and psychological studies. It would be naive to assume, or ask for, 'direct' or 'undistorted' access.⁸

During the whole time of fieldwork this Brahman tried, with (1) didactic skill, by discussing some topics while suppressing others, the way of discussion respectively rhetoric, to inculcate an 'authorized' picture of India in the ethnographer.⁹ This behavior was, in my opinion, due to the (2) basically 'orthodox'-conservative attitude of Dr. Pandey, his function as a high school teacher, which routinely includes official behavior and statements. Also, it was due to (3) the speech situation - meetings in his house in the presence of his sister and one niece, and others present

'behind the curtains' - his elder brother and a few other family members who always overheard our conversation, the elder brother sometimes interfering from the background in another room.

These three factors, and a very widespread kind of national pride - as well as a certain insecurity regarding the function and intentions of the ethnographer - added to his 'official' attitude. It became clear that informants of other position and 'disposition' reacted very differently. Some of them, mostly in private conversations, assumed a very critical and analytical position *vis-à-vis* their country and culture. At the end of the above process (an end which is not formally fixed)¹⁰ appears - according to implicit expectations of the counterpart - the transformed student, 'purified and reformed' in the sense of an authoritative, positivistic and affirmative view of the culture and the country: A being which has been ideologically incorporated into the system after a period of *transition*, more or less 'a believer'.

I hesitate to explain the above process through the concept of assimilation theories since it would lead in other directions. Rather, for the present context, I prefer to mention the more specific notion of inclusivism (P. Hacker), which describes a central characteristic of Indian culture (cf. Oberhammer 1983; Oberdiek 1991: 25ff., 183ff.): the incorporation of other, new elements by marking and labeling them, and by positioning these new items in an appropriate place in the Indian system. It may be that this takeover leaves new items unchanged, but more often they will be changed - either in content, or in their function(s). If the latter is the case their inner 'mechanics' will remain the same, but they will serve Indian cultural aims and functions (cf. Oberdiek 1991: 25ff., 251ff.). This process may be called 'instrumental takeover'.

Burghart (1996a: 112) says that 'ethnographic texts on Hindu society' would be 'products of complex agency'. By complex agency he means 'potency' and power to con-

[Original p. 107:]

vince and act, intentions of actors, and also 'transcendental' legitimation to do or say something and the resulting claim for 'truth'. In this process the behavior of recipients of such action also needs to be considered (cf. Bell 1992: 213). Complex agency is, according to Burghart, especially relevant in Indian culture and in the case of brahmanic literati. Here, two members of distinct cultural groups meet, two types of specialists - the Brahman and the ethnographer. These two claim to know and

communicate a 'valid' and comprehensive representation of the culture: the anthropologist in his scientific framework, the Brahman based on religious legitimation qua birth, mental concentration, initiation rituals, and textual knowledge (Burghart 1996a: 89f.). Burghart attributes the Brahman (with) an 'eternally present transcendence' because the system of his knowledge, via the cyclical world view for instance, claims eternal validity. Burghart's description of complex agency reminds somewhat of Max Weber's 'Amtscharisma'.

Complex agency between the ethnographer and the Brahman emerges, according to Burghart, if western anthropologists apply conceptions of the brahmanical textual system, such as the yuga concept - as has been done in the past. Another case would be the 'ideal Brahman'. These basically theological concepts have been used by anthropologists as a framework for their research - instead of exploring ethnographic reality without such concepts, anthropologists would utilize Indian categories in constructing their cognitive insights and texts. Burghart thus criticizes these so-called 'European Brahmans'. First specimens have been Jesuit missionaries, and some present anthropologists - he considers Louis Dumont to be one of them (Burghart 1996a: 98f., 105).¹¹

The present study strives to avoid such a Brahmanization of the anthropological text¹² - which is inherent in the analytical subject itself. Instead, it tries to uncover processes of 'encapsulation' and the above-mentioned 'inclusivism' which may lead to this type of Brahmanization. Although I believe that such a process is not unique but fairly widespread¹³ - depending on the type of culture - I think it can be fruitfully described in a context like the complex, well-documented, textual Indian tradition.

Obeyesekere (1990) has described a comparable interactionist frame, although he did not elaborate concretely on processes and consequences prominent in Burghart's text. His paper has been published in 1990 for the first time, Obeyesekere's text dates back to the Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures of 1982, and was published in 1990 - he does not mention Burghart, although both concepts are rather similar. Obeyesekere refers to Anthony Giddens and Peter Winch, two texts of 1976 respectively 1974, published much earlier than Burghart's paper (who does not refer to Giddens and Winch):

"Both Giddens and Winch make the point that the informant is like the social scientist in several regards; he also has theories of his society and other

conceptions, ideal and real, of how the world should be organized. But what further complicates this picture is that he too has controversies (or 'debates') with his own fellows regarding all of this. In this sense he shares our own contentious natures as scholars. In other words a native point of view perhaps exists only in the rare case, let us say, of key eschatological notions, such as, for example, the nature of the Buddha and the meanings of karma and salvation in Sri Lankan Buddhism." (Obeyesekere 1990:219)

This sounds like Burghart, the difference being that there are two 'reversals': (1) Obeyesekere defines the ethnographer/informant equation in a universal way - as basically applying to all ethnographic settings, while Burghart deals with this topic as if it were applicable especially in the Indian situation - because of a cultural complexity and particularly due to the 'institution' of brahmanical literati; (2) The last sentence of the above citation discusses a cultural - specifically South Asian - realm which cannot be reciprocated by the ethnographer: eschatological belief. But in this particular case Burghart (1996a: 97ff) has reported an intensive relation between ethnographer and the culture of his informants - an 'intercultural mimesis', which can be proven and which is factual: the ethnographer uses the informants' special knowledge and

[Original p. 108:]

designs his fieldwork accordingly. This is Burghart's European Brahman - in a direct sense. Another, transposed, meaning might be a quasi-brahmanical attitude concerning one's own culture, i.e. an orthodoxy, especially a scientific ('decidedly etic'), and certainly a scientist attitude, which is, in a popular saying: being more Catholic than the Pope. Thus, Burghart has driven the concept much further.

But Obeyesekere's study has a different methodological, and besides an informant-related context: he analyzes the relation between ethnographer and the culture studied with a psychological-psychoanalytical framework, in order to refute - among other things - that Freud's psychoanalysis cannot be applied in other cultures. In this old debate on particularism and universalism, strict and concrete description and meaning and function of ideal types, the discourse on the subjectivity of the ethnographer and the rhetoric trying to camouflage it, Obeyesekere defines three 'intersubjectivities' (ibid. 217-274). The first two of them remain somewhat vague, cannot be identified, or demarcated very clearly. Starting point is his comparison of the commonalities between (cultural) anthropology and Freudian

psychoanalysis. To bring these out he uses the three intersubjectivities as delimiting guidelines:

"...hence my idea of the three intersubjective realms the psychoanalyst and anthropologist must be involved in. To borrow a metaphor from Sophocles' *Oedipus*, the 'three intersubjectivities' are the crossroads where the cultural anthropologist must meet Freud if he is to undertake any kind of serious psychoethnography. First, there are those intersubjective relationships bound by common values prevailing in the group that he studies [this indicates the content-related aspect]. To study this realm of intersubjective relationships, the ethnographer must use himself as a tool. But he is not a tool; thus a second thrust of my inquiry in the last lecture is whether psychoanalysis can throw light on the subject-object relationship that prevails in this 'second intersubjectivity.' [This describes relations between persons.] Third, the anthropologist is involved in a variety of other audiences with whom he must communicate by virtue of his profession as ethnographer and theorist. Most significant in this third intersubjective realm is communication with his colleagues, without which there can be no real expansion of knowledge. Hence the question: What kind of theory is helpful for studying the first and second intersubjectivities that simultaneously permits me to engage in a dialogue with my colleagues and beyond that reach into the world of contemporary culture?" (Obeyesekere 1990: XXI - my underlining)

Apparently, Obeyesekere here tries to facilitate a legitimatory-ethical combination, or coordination, of nos. 1 and 3. This shows another parallel with Burghart's text - it is roughly the problem of etic and emic presentation. The latter is considered to be illusory by Obeyesekere.¹⁴ While Burghart introduces a basically two-fold model - the dialog of the ethnographer with his colleagues, and the one with 'his people' (Burghart 1996a: 111), the latter of which he describes concretely and including theoretical implications - Obeyesekere constructs a three-fold model. His nos. 2 and 3 coincide with Burghart's model, and are discussed by Obeyesekere regarding cognition-theoretical aspects - although the stress is on the rehabilitation and necessity of psychoanalysis. Both texts were published in 1990 - whether one of them knew the other remains undecided.

Now I would like to describe a process in Rajakshetra which may be classed as a liminoid rite of passage according to Turner, Pitt-Rivers (1986) and Moore & Myerhoff (1977): the attempt to influence, change and integrate the ethnographer in certain respects - the attempt to (imbibe, install) the brahmanical conceptual system in him.

4. Teaching the ethnographer - a passage process

To apply Burghart's model I have chosen two passages from tape recordings (1996 in Rajakshetra) showing characteristics in question. For this purpose I qualify and further differentiate Burghart's model to fit the present ethnographic situation, because in Rajakshetra there was not just rival interpretations, but also 'accomplicity' with the ethnographer against the trading caste which was the main object of fieldwork. This [Original p. 109:]

implies two things: the delimitation of the Brahman against the trading caste, and verbal accomplicity with the ethnographer in the given communicative situation. This accomplicity may have the following meanings. At a first glance, and against the background of Burghart's concept of rival interpretation accomplicity would not make sense since it is no direct rivalization. In the context of a passage rite it appears meaningful, however, because the 'initiate' is to be likened to the indigenous system, he is to be included, or at least changed in line with the official, affirmative logic of the system - which can be facilitated via (at least seeming) accomplicity. In this case the 'socialization' of the ethnographer into the Indian system, his 'acculturation' would be 'caste-specific', would follow caste logic: against the traders' caste and in line with the brahmanical caste level. This may be correct cognitively at least, since a 'scientist' may have more affinity with the Brahman than with a trader. But on the other hand this way of exerting influence is a general 'Hindu' one, because there is antagonism between castes - separation, or 'reciprocal repulsion' as already Bouglé (1971: 27) fittingly said in 1908.

5. Content and interpretation of transcripts

The exact text of talks is included in the appendix. First I shall represent them contentwise. These analyses intend to show contents, tactics and strategy of the exertion of influence by the Brahman counterpart.

First text passage:

Rival interpretation (relating to classical Sanskrit texts)

The first topic of the conversation is the (possible) mythical character of Agrav 1 origin - a mythical ruler, Agrasen, who is believed to have founded the caste, but who factually appears only in a few obscure texts, not in well-known mythological texts (like Pur ~as) or in history.

As a reply, my counterpart, Mr. Pandey, states he has read a book with the title "Myths and facts about the Bible". This implies that even in the

case of the Bible - which is 'the book' of the ethnographer's culture, and the most sacred one, too, there are myths. The meaning of this move seems rather clear: it represents a counter-attack following my assumption that the Agrasen story is only made up. I confirm his statement, as in many other cases, to create an atmosphere of uninhibited exchange.

In his next statement he compares the time of the two events - in Jesus' case 2000 years, in Agrasen's about 5000 - according to myth (if Agrasen was a contemporary of Kṛṣṇa, as is often stated). This means that according to mythological time Agrasen lived well before Christ, according to an Indian cultural value of *ancienneté* it is a hierarchical statement as well: older is better, more awe-inspiring, of higher value.

I reply that the name of Agraval does not figure in old, classical texts. Pandey reacts by naming two rather new books on Agraval in Hindi, of whose existence I had told him earlier: Parameshvar Lal Agraval; it deals with the caste in old times, although there is no proof in a scientific sense. Pandey even mentions the PhD degree of P. L. Agraval, possibly in order to give this book more 'scientific' importance. The other book, of a similar type, named by him is by S. Vidyabharati. He adds it is a very large book, and: when 'we' will go through this book 'we' will find when the name has been used for the first time.

Mr. Pandey then uses a quasi scientific attitude: since we have not read this book yet, we cannot say anything, because we do not know.

Analysis of this passage:

The ethnographer's statement on the age of the mythical ruler Agrasen is countered by Pandey: implicitly he says that Christ, an important figure of occidental religion, is or may be: 1) also mythical, and 2) much younger. Such tactics is often repeated in other contexts - it is uttered almost invariably in the case of sensitive topics or emotive words concerning culture or India. If there are statements he cannot prove wrong, Mr. Pandey reacts with more careful wordings. But he also suppressed topics he did not like - sometimes by sophistic rhetoric, sometimes by force (i.e. by being loud, or openly

[Original p. 110:]

brushing the topic off). In the present case the former can be shown: 1) his statement of Agrasen being born 5000 years ago, and the addition "they say";

2) I repeat "they say" to point to the hypothetical nature of these words;

3) In the next sentence, referring to the relation of Kṛṣṇa and Agrasen,

Pandey is more careful by using the clause "And if he was... Kṛ ~a's contemporary..." (my underlining)

By using the personal pronoun 'we' Pandey expresses a mutuality, the cooperation of two persons for one aim, in *one* way, i.e. not opposed action. This may also be interpreted as a case of inclusivism, and/or paternalism/superiority on his part.

Second text passage:

Rival interpretation (relating to anthropological method and Pandey's negative attitude towards the Agrav 1 caste)

Here, Mr. Pandey makes the fundamental objection of Agrav 1 members behaving unnaturally, since they know a book is being written on them. He starts by asking for my opinion about this caste. I reply in a general way: that during the last decades there has been much change; however, most members of the caste still work in their traditional occupations. I further say that the local population thinks that Agrav 1s are very conservative and differ from other local trading castes, and that they would not mix with them. Here, Pandey interferes and asks for my opinion about their 'psychology' - since they know I will write about them. He then voices his thought directly: They would not act naturally. I reply that I am conscious of this. He continues: they try to show how sincere they are - especially in business. Instead, I should move in the society of such Agrav 1s who do not know my intentions - *then* I would see their real nature. Next, I state the ethical standpoint in anthropology, that one should tell one's intentions. He agrees formally, but objects that then the disadvantage of unnatural behavior would come in - it would be a weak point in the study. He moves further in this direction: the interviewees would not show their 'real character'. He closes by stating again that I should move among Agrav 1s who do not know me.

Analysis of this passage:

Mr. Pandey comments on the work of the ethnographer and proposes methodological changes. At the same time, one might think, he seems to stand by the ethnographer, to support his work. In other words, he leaves the local position and seems to 'work' in the context of the other culture (the ethnographer's project).

This shows - it seems - that he assumes a position against the caste (Agrav 1) in question. But this behavior is also clearly culture-immanent since it is an indigenous cultural trait: castes and their respective

ideologies (caste dharma) being opposed which results in separative behavior. Such antagonistic attitudes maintain and separate the groups. From this perspective Mr. Pandey acts according to traditional caste behavior.

Accomplicity with the ethnographer is therefore ambiguous. Correspondence with the ethnographer also becomes questionable because in other conversations Mr. Pandey tried to 'demoralize' the ethnographer: the study could not be successful because the interviewees knew about the project.

6. Interpreting informants' statements

Thus, Pandey has pointed to - in the two text passages presented here, and in other talks - the inexpediency of conducting the study in Rajakshetra, because: 1) members of the Agraval caste are informed of my study; and 2) they would know nothing about their caste. Therefore it would be more profitable to study this caste elsewhere.

This type of behavior has been observed by other authors, I would like to describe two cases (Trawick 1996; Burghart 1996b). Although these aspects have not been highlighted by them it is fruitful for the present purpose.

The first case deals with the influencing and conditioning by indigenous people, high caste people. Trawick (1996) wanted to record the story/history of Singamma, one (the) goddess of the Jackal Hunter caste (Reddiar), whose shrine is in Melur (Tamil

[Original p. 111:]

Nadu). The authoress calls them a caste, but they are actually a tribal group, 'Adivasi', a 'Scheduled Tribe' to use the bureaucratic term (ibid. 71). Trawick talks of difficulties which, as may be concluded, have to do with the contents of the story. One evening Singamma was raped by 'some high-caste men' on her way home. When the authoress tried to trace the story in Melur, 'high-caste people' tried to stop her: "The high-caste people in Melur told me to give up my search. They told me that even if I found the Jackal Hunters, they would not be able to help me. The Jackal Hunters, they said, were dirty and dangerous people whom I should stay away from; moreover, according to the townspeople of Melur, the Jackal Hunters knew nothing about Singamma, even though she had been a girl of their caste." (Trawick 1996: 59f.) From this passage three relevant points may be concluded:

1) It is understandable if 'high-caste' men try to prevent the ethnographer (and other outsiders as well) from spreading the story

because it shows this group's negative behavior regarding women of lower hierarchical position - although submission and rape of low-caste women by high-caste men is a well known fact in India.

2) The statement that the Jackal Hunters would know nothing about their own goddess Singamma, is characteristic of (for) caste antagonism: a given caste thinks itself to be more knowledgeable about another caste (especially if the latter is lower) than the caste itself. If the present statement comes from a Brahman caste (which is not specified by Trawick), Brahman expertise in religious matters is an additional factor for superiority assumed by Brahmins.

3) The classification of the Jackal Hunters as 'dirty and dangerous' is designed to additionally put off the ethnographer.

Such efforts to divert or re-direct the attention of the ethnographer reminds of Mr. Pandey's strategy in Rajakshetra. To be complete, a second version of the Singamma story in Trawick's paper should be mentioned. In this version she has been raped by her brothers - which might neutralize the above argument. I tend to interpret the second variant as a general hint at a widespread practice of rape - a kind of statement that rape of women by men constitutes a certain 'cultural' behavior. It is this message that is given in the second case - the first is augmented by the special information that the culturally codified type of rape especially occurs as a hierarchy-specific action (high-low-caste). If one considers both versions, which are both practiced in the cultural context, the meaning of the stories is: women are raped - within their own family, and with respect to hierarchical difference.

The second ethnographic case (Burghart 1996b) deals with the documentation of spoken local language in Mithila (Northern Bihar and Southeast Nepal). Wherever the ethnographer met people and talked about this subject, he was told that the authentic language is spoken about twenty kilometers away in this or that direction - but not here! So people tried to send him to a different place. Burghart even notes (referring to G. Griersons 'Linguistic Survey of India (1903-28: Vol. I, Pt. 1: 19) who obviously had the same experience) that he may be not the only one to get such advice, but he does not draw any conclusions. But Burghart does characterize Grierson's and his informants' opinion: for Grierson this language would have existed 'nowhere' - i.e. only in the imagination of the people. But for the mind of the people it *did* exist - but somewhere else.

Considering my informant's behavior, Trawick's and Burghart's descriptions can be interpreted in a more general way: They are influenced by two value complexes: In Trawick's case it is values of sexuality, status and power; in Burghart's case values of the urban and parochial sphere, respectively the difference of high culture and parochialism.¹⁵

7. Discussion: Qualifying Burghart's concept and a remark on terminology

In his paper Burghart has focused on an 'interlinear' dialog - between ethnographer and his colleagues. He further distinguishes between the 'intertextual dialog' (between ethnographer and persons of the culture studied by him (1996a: 111)) and he

[Original p. 112:]

has designed at least two roles for the ethnographer: he/she may, for the purpose of data acquisition, behave like a 'Brahman', but must not do so in the function as an author. That is, for certain purposes he/she might or should assume one of these two roles.

This shows, in my opinion, that Burghart's statements on the 'local counterpart' of the ethnographer have to be considerably qualified and differentiated if processes in interaction are seen 'close up'. There are not just two conceptual models: the Brahman view and the 'anthropological' world view. Instead, each of the two people in the encounter may assume different roles - which may be even mixed according to tactical or strategic necessity (not to forget subconscious processes!), or used selectively in certain phases of the interaction. This may generate results that are less clear-cut. So, interaction is factually characterized by role pluralism. Since a person may even play contradictory roles (which may be wise or unwise regarding his/her aim), behavior has to be analyzed individually and contextually.

According to the terminology of passage rites, a different state has been gained - after a period of transition, the medium of change mainly being communication. The setting of this interaction has been classically described as 'ritual' setting, especially in liminal phenomena. In liminoid phenomena the ritual aspect becomes more difficult to grasp - since we are used to the connection of 'ritual' with 'religious' for instance.

It can be asked whether the described kind of 'indoctrination' in Rajakshetra may be called liminal (not liminoid), since the contents involved are religious legitimations for the most part, and because the

daily course of events - of the meeting - were clearly ritualized: they were routinely organized, took place daily at the same time, always in the same room and at the same place (chairs) in the house of the Brahman. There was always the same succession of actions: first Hindi conversation, then a break with tea and snacks (of varying type, however), then talks of a more general kind, mostly in English. In the end, a few paragraphs from a Hindi text (such as Mah bh rata or R macaritm nasa) were translated. This frame, even the text selection, was set and decided by the Brahman, i.e. the 'structure of ceremony' (Goody 1977: 34) was fixed. This corresponds in major parts with Bell's characteristics of a 'ritualization' in the context of power processes.¹⁶ So it has been possible to explain interaction in Rajakshetra through a combination of hermeneutic, or approaches of the sociology of cognition with the ritual and processual theory.

Appendix: Transcripts of conversations

These talks have been recorded in Rajakshetra in March and April 1996. Discourse analytical method is based on Brenneis (1996), Brenneis & Macaulay (1996) and Langford (1994).

List of symbols (Langford 1994: 44ff.).

The end of an incomplete word: -

non-word vocalization: äh, em, ...

inhalation (in-breaths): °h - repeated according to duration

exhalation (outbreaths): h° - "

unidentified words, the number of asterisks shows the number of syllables: (***)

intonation:

loud: capitalized letters

quietness: ° before and after the word(s).

stress: underlined: (_____)

raised pitch high: # before and after the word(s).

lowered pitch high: ı before and after the word(s).

raised pitch in a syllable: ´ on the respective vocal.

lowered pitch in a syllable: ` on the respective vocal.

[Original p. 113:]

stretched segments: colon (:), Wiederholung je nach Länge der Dehnung.

There is no punctuation. Silence is indicated by the number of seconds in brackets: (0,5); (2); etc. Less than half a second is indicated by (.).

Simultaneous speaking: Round bracket at the end of the line:

xxxxxxxxxx

llllllllllll

xxxxxxx

mmmmmmmm

or:

xxxxxxxxxxxxx

eeeeeeeeeeeeee

I.e. utterances of the first three lines have been spoken simultaneously, or: two statements in one line, spoken simultaneously.

Texts:

Abbreviations: P = Pandey; Br. = his brother; e = ethnographer, ego.

1) Rival interpretation (relating to classical Sanskrit texts)

P No ähhmm otherwise mmhh ahh mythical (.) everything is mythical

e (laughs) in a way (.) yes

P Recently I was going to the ba** (.) He had (s) written "Myths and facts about bible"

e Yeah I know that book yeah

P Do you know e Yes I know

P There are so many myths about (it)

e Yes I know (.) of course

P Everything (.) everywhere (1.0) And he belonged only two-hundred äh twothousand years ähh before (.) he took birth (1.5) Jesus Christ e yeayah

P And Agrasen was born nearly and you ähh read only yesterday 5000 years back they say

e they say

P They say (.) And if he be- was the mmhh Lord Krishna's contemporary (2.0) as you find in the ~ stras (0.5) then definitely that period is ***

e jaja (.) Then the only question is (.) why is the name Agrav l never in the old texts

P In the old texts (.) But ahh mh I I tell you there is one book and you have to purchase that (1.5) Agrav ls in ancient tíme (1.0) That book has been written by Doctor Parame~var ähh L l Agrav l (.) and it is a-**** no but th- **** Vidy la" k r (0.5) this book has been written by him (.) and it's a very voluminous work (1.0) And if we go through that then we can find when and where this word was first used (2.0)

e yeah (.) That is written P We had we had not studied so

much as yet you know (1.0) so we cannot say (.) when this word was used first

e mmmhh

Br. You have to authenticate the myth P Yes this ähh

Br. **** convert it into truth e Yeah (laughs)

Br. When it is become truth it is made acknowledged by Tom Dick and Harry P No)

P the first thing is that ähh today I had an intention of telling you
the ahhh same thing (0.5) about that book
e yees (.) okay

2) **Rival interpretation** (concerning anthropological method and a
negative attitude vis-à-vis the Agrav l caste)

P and ehh ahhm what do you think about them

e You mean (0.5) in général or fff

P in general I mean suppose you are taking the Agrav ls (1.0) as a
whole e yeah

P and you have to say something about them

[Original p. 114:]

e há yeah yeah

P yes (0.5) thèn (0.5) what is ähh your mmmh reading

e ehhem mmmh (1.0) I thínk todá'y is a kind of a turning point I
mean these years now presently these nine- nineteen-nineties
nineteen-eighties or so (0.5) these dècades (1.0) are a turning point ähh
it is mmhh I assúme that they come from this Vai~ya mmhh means
business background and ähh here in Rajakshetra about ninety percent
of them still are business men P h m m

e business people °hhh and also what (2.0) others tell me like
Kumaonis tell me (0.5) they are more conservative (0.5) they are more::
traditional:: they observe other rules than Kumaonis (1.0) °hh and that
means they are distinct from others (0.5) stíll (1.0) maybe that comes
from their Rajasthani or Haryana background I don't know (1.0) ähh

P And suppose if you have to (0.5) say äh same words about their
psychology

e yeah

P Whát do you think of them (3.0) because they know that you are
going to write something on them

e yes yes I know

P And they won't behave in their natural way before you this much
I tell you

e They won't jaja

P They won't behave

e I know

P They knów

e I know

P that you are going to are going to write something

e yes yés

P about them

e I know

P and they will try to show that they are

e

hahaha

P very pure-hearted

e haha

P and they are very honest they are honest-working (0.5) and like this

e yes (lacht)

P they will try

e yè's I know

P Now n- now if suppose if you meet mm- move in the company of some other Agrav ls

e hmmh

P who do not know you that you are go- working on them

e yes

P and then you will feel how they behàve

e Jaja this a °h (0.5) tricky question Usually in my field in anthropology P Yes

e it is considered to be ethically good or correct to tell people what you are going to do

P No that is alright

e ahhh yeah

P But then their behavior can not be natural that is mmhh ehh the drawback

e Yes But I also know that of course

P Yes

e I also know that

P That I wanted to point out

e

Yeah

P because it is ähh mmh it may be a mmh weak point

e yea yea yes certainly

P Suppose ähh if you mmhh write

e ahhm

P ehh mmh after mmhh telling them

e jaa

P that you are mmhh going to [!] something on them

e yes

[Original p. 115:]

P and so you are staying with them

e yes

P it's but natural that they will not show their real character

e haha

P ** you It is natural

e hahah

e I knów

P Everyone

e Everyone will do that what- whatever caste

P whatever caste

e and so on jaja

P Soooo, ahmm ehh you will have to move (0.5) among those also

e who are not Agrav ls

P who are #no# (1.0) who are also Agrav ls (1.0) but do not know
that you are working
on them e ja ja ja ja

P that is also one point
e Yeah ja you are right yes I know P N6

P They are (0.5) mmh let them be Agrav ls
e ja ja
P but they must not know that you are working on thém
e Ja ja mmh

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¹"Goody... sees no further usefulness in a 'global construct' like ritual and has seriously called for its retirement in favor of a revitalizing 'paradigm shift.'" (Bell 1992:6) Bell thinks that "so-called ritual activities be removed from their isolated position as special paradigmatic acts and restored to the context of social activity in general." (ibid. 7) This would be equal to an integration into action theory. For the present purpose, however, I prefer to use the framework of theories of transition. They do not assess the present ethnographic situation 'completely', however, but can be meaningfully complemented by Burghart's description of 'rival interpretations'. Bell continues: "...I propose a focus on 'ritualization' as a strategic way of acting and then turn to explore how and why this way of acting differentiates itself from other practices. (ibid.) In the third part of her book Bell describes ritual as a form of social control. Burghart's (1996a) paper, however, explicitly deals with this aspect of the process.

²"In complex, modern societies both types coexist in a sort of cultural pluralism. But the liminal - found in the activities of churches, sects, and movements, in the initiation rites of clubs, fraternities, masonic orders, and other secret societies, etc. - is no longer world-wide. Nor are the liminoid phenomena which tend to be the leisure genres of art, sport, pastimes, games, etc., practiced by and for particular groups, categories, segments and sectors of large-scale industrial societies of all types." (Turner 1982: 55) Turner here uses the term 'genre' for actions and spheres defined as liminoid by him.

³"La démonstration en sera faite en prenant un exemple qui ne doit rien ni à la culture des archaïques ni à la tradition paysanne, mais s'est crée de toutes pièces, depuis une soixantaine d'années, principalement en France et en Angleterre." (Pitt-Rivers 1986: 118)

⁴The 'sacred air' that surrounds and pervades air travel may be not only connected with a representation of national aspects, but can be a result of the extraordinary achievement of moving through the air. This is an age-old dream of

mankind and may inspire awe and certainly a change of consciousness due to the major material change - moving through the air. Another fact not considered by Pitt-Rivers is the danger inherent in air travel: customary material security of moving on the ground is removed. This may well inspire, or rather necessitate, a transposition of consciousness that moves psycho-physical energy and feeling along traditional religious lines: this type of 'being besides oneself' may have been one reason for the emergence of religion. Air travel can be borne only by some kind of psycho-physical matching process. Thus, the potential of Pitt-Rivers' example is much more far-reaching.

⁵Further combinations could be designed according to the theoretical aim or goal. In the present case an extension including psychological aspects of the passage process might be useful, employing the above-mentioned approach of St. Clair & Koo (1991). A study focusing on ritual purity/impurity could utilize Mary Douglas' in- and out-group mechanism and Dumontian categories. It seems meaningful for the basic construction to use a rather comprehensive theoretical approach, such as rites of passage, which might be complemented by additional contextual and concretizing approaches satisfying specific aspects and details required by the ethnographic situation. This pluralism of approaches is basically hermeneutic and can be understood as a counterpart to Geertz' 'thick description' on the level of theory.

⁶This meant that the anthropological meta-level, necessary for 'scientific processing', was not to be neglected: "The anthropologist enters his field of study, is subjected by others in local society, rewords his social experience in the metalanguage of his representation, and goes on to elaborate and corroborate this representation with reference to further observations." (Burghart 1996a: 89)

⁷It is a different question that textual knowledge in this ethnographic context has been either 'folklorized' or 'parochialized' (cf. footnote 15).

⁸It is interesting to note that Burghart did not discuss his own person, or processes he underwent. Considering his analysis and critique of the behavior of anthropologists, one can only guess that he tried to avoid the 'dangers' described by him.

⁹"They sometimes do not give correct picture." - L.P. Vidyarthi on the depiction of India by non-Indian authors; personal communication in 1984.

¹⁰It takes as much time as it takes: During this process gradual changes take place; an 'end' is probably never reached in a complex culture as this one. Possible 'steps' of the process of transition, or passage, might be: 1) Participation in festivals (and - possibly - rituals, and also related behavioral integration); 2) integration in families; 3) learning the language, reading and knowing classical texts - resulting in respective status gain, especially when this is accompanied by affirmative statements; 4) choosing an Indian marriage partner; 4) economic integration - like doing business, etc.

¹¹"...social anthropologists have found it difficult to generalize about Hindu society without coming into some relationship with Brahmans and their view of society." (Burghart 1996a: 90) F. Staal (1996: 152-155) may be considered as another case of 'European Brahman'. He has criticized Turner, who, in the context of Ndembu rites, has identified two qualities or characteristics: symbol and plot (ibid. 152). Staal refuses to accept the characteristic of symbol in the case of the Vedic Agnicayana ritual studied by him - except for few exceptions the label of symbol would not be applicable here. His argument is developed completely from within the ritual and the viewpoint of the involved religious specialists (yajam na). For Burghart, this would be a classical case of 'western Brahmanism' - Staal acts as an exegete here: "...it gives rise to different interpretations by the actors (exegesis) as well as by the observers (sociology)." (Goody 1977: 31) Neither Goody nor Burghart employ the well-known categories of emic/etic, which may *also* be applicable in the case of Staal's text. Staal's move, however, is not a subconscious one, I assume, and he does not act in the same way as does the Brahman priest

when he stresses a lack of the quality of symbol in the Vedic sacrifice. Instead he attempts a *conscious* explanation of the ritual from within.

¹²Burgharts 'stage direction' in this case: "Should a native spokesman on Hindu society, say a village Brahman, discourse about the hierarchy of four varna, the social anthropologist may ignore the comments unless he perceives that local interpretations influence social behaviour." (Burghart 1996a: 96)

¹³But not necessarily 'universal'.

¹⁴"Many ethnographers give primacy to the natives' point of view by constructing an 'emic' picture of the natives' society or culture. But an emic perspective is misleading for a variety of reasons. The very incorporation of the alien culture into the vocabulary and grammatical structure of the anthropologists' language makes nonsense of the emic claims of the investigation. Since, moreover, the natives' point of view is a misnomer, an emic presentation based on a misnomer must itself be a misnomer. The anthropologist never has a chance of sampling a range of native opinions, though ethnographies are peppered with pronouncements indicating that this is indeed the case - hence statements such as 'villagers say that . . .', 'according to my informants . . .'. In reality the anthropologist works with select or key informants who for the most part make themselves available to the investigator. An 'emic' perspective in this situation?" (Obeyesekere 1990: 220)

¹⁵That is, provincially, rurally oriented - used by authors like Yogendra Singh, McKim Marriott and Milton Singer, as opposed to 'universalization' (as a characteristic or direction in which a culture moves).

¹⁶"...these activities may differentiate themselves by a variety of features; in practice, some general tendencies are obvious. For example, these activities may use a delineated and structured space to which access is restricted; a special periodicity for the occurrence and internal orchestration of the activities; restricted codes of communication to heighten the formality of movement and speech; distinct and specialized personnel; objects, texts, and dress designated for use in these activities alone; verbal and gestural combinations that evoke or purport to be the ways things have always been done..." (Bell 1992: 204f.)

Bell further defines three major mechanisms designating the authority to control or effect ritualization: 1) objectification of office; 2) hierarchization of practices; 3) traditionalization (ibid. 212).